PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

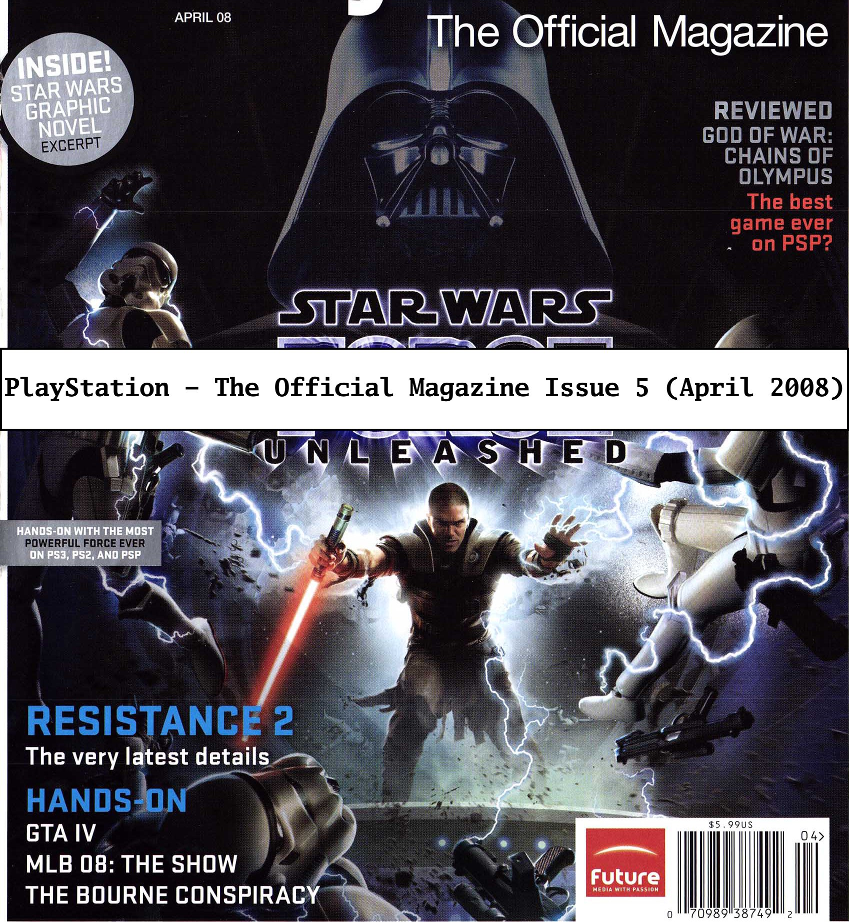
PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

APRIL 08

INSIDE!
STAR WARS
GRAPHIC
NOVEL
EXCERPT

REVIEWED
GOD OF WAR:
CHAINS OF
OLYMPUS
The best
game ever
on PSP?



PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 5 (April 2008)

HANDS-ON WITH THE MOST
POWERFUL FORCE EVER
ON PS3, PS2, AND PSP

RESISTANCE 2

The very latest details

HANDS-ON

GTA IV
MLB 08: THE SHOW
THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY

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IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS DARKNESS.

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Nudity
Sexual Content

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GOD OF WAR
CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

Long before his battle with Ares, Kratos was a servant to the Gods. Ordered deep into the underworld, the Ghost of Sparta faced an impossible choice: Redeem himself or save the ancient world from eternal darkness.

"9 out of 10. Reaches legendary heights."
– *Game Informer*

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PSP
PlayStation® Portable

®

Contents

April 2008

PlayStation The Official Magazine

🟥 PlayStation 3 ☐ PlayStation Portable 🟩 PlayStation Network 🟦 PlayStation 2

You've never seen the Force like this—with unique options on all three platforms, it offers something for everyone.

Features

48 STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

59 STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED GRAPHIC NOVEL

Update

18 BLU-RAY REVIEWS

6 God of War PSP Bundle

10 THE PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW: KEITA TAKAHASHI

14 PlayStation Digest

15 Top Ten List

FEEL THE FORCE

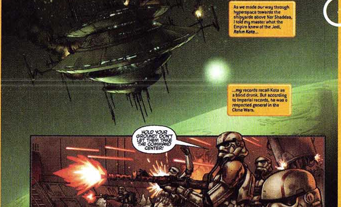
Strap yourself in for canon-shaking revelations as the gloves come off and LucasArts prepares *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed.*

By Rob Smith

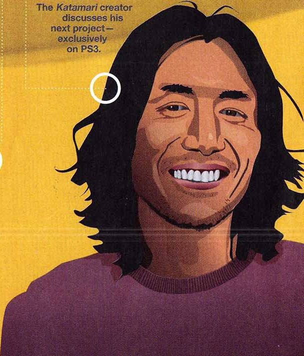
Platform: PS3, PS2, PSP

Force grip a stormtrooper. Hand extended, emitting all that power (it's like you can feel it through the controller), you effortlessly lift his flailing carcass off the ground, and, with a flick of right-analog stick and a release of the grip, lob him hundreds of feet before he lands in a twisted, crumpled heap. One down, hundreds more to go, but that's no major worry when you're Darth Vader's secret apprentice and wielding Force power to the nth degree... Force amped... Force juiced... The Force unleashed.

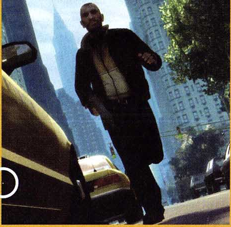
Sneak a peak at the upcoming *SW:TFU* graphic novel with our exclusive excerpt on p.59.


As we made our way through hyperspace towards the shipyards above Nar Shaddaa, I told my master what the Empire knew of the Jedi, *Rahm Kota*...
...my records recall Kota as a blood drunk. But according to Imperial records, he was a respected general in the Clone Wars.
HOLD YOUR GROUND! DON'T LET THEM TAKE THE COMMAND CENTER!

PAN'S LABYRINTH

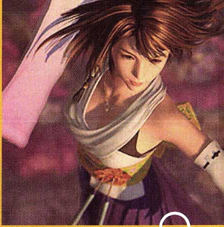


The *Katamari* creator discusses his next project—exclusively on PS3.



We go for a joyride around Liberty City and this is what we saw.

Is *Chains of Olympus* the system-selling game the PSP has been waiting for?



FF fans explain why they hold this series so close to their hearts.

Previews

46 Baroque

38 The Bourne Conspiracy

24 **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**

46 Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds

47 Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust

47 Mana Khemia: Alchemists of Al-Revis

36 **MLB 08: THE SHOW**

32 Project Baja

28 Resistance 2

40 Tiberium

46 Tomb Raider: Underworld

Reviews

84 The Club

80 Conflict: Denied Ops

73 Downstream Panic

72 Dynasty Warriors 6

68 **GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS**

88 Iridium Runners

74 MLB 2K8

76 NFL Tour

82 Obscure: The Aftermath

78 **PATAPON**

87 Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection

87 Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity

77 Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition

86 Wipeout Pulse

Network

90 **FINAL FANTASY ADORATION**

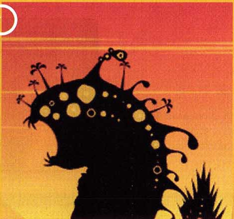
92 **LETTERS**

94 PlayStation Network: Reviews, Downloads

96 PlayStation POV

Fan-created content. You asked, we delivered. P.S. Send us more art!

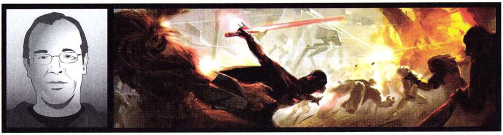
Ryan Howard chats about suiting up for his motion capture session for *MLB 08: The Show.*



A rhythm game like you've never seen before. It has us chiming "Pata Pata Pata Pon" non-stop!

Editor's Note

"They just followed me around over town and read the news on the seat of my pants."



I vividly remember the monumental good fortune of bumping into my best friend who was window shopping with his dad in Sheffield town center, killing time until the afternoon matinee showing of a cool looking new movie called *Star Wars*. I remember convincing my mom to let me go with them to see it. I remember oh-so-clearly the Star Destroyer. I remember in the aftermath impersonating R2-D2, squeaking with annoying ease as my parents wondered what wounded cat was lurking near our house.

> "I remember in the aftermath impersonating R2-D2, squeaking with annoying ease as my parents wondered what wounded cat was lurking near our house."

I remember putting my first ten pence (this was England, of course) in the coin slot adjacent to the cockpit seat of the arcade machine. I remember crashing and burning. I remember buying a ZX Spectrum game called *3D Starstrike* because, well, it was a total *Star Wars* arcade game rip-off (and yes, I actually bought it, and didn't do the tape-to-tape copying of games that was prevalent to the point of being epidemic in my high school playground).

I remember SNES *Empire Strikes Back* being the cool kids' game of choice (while everyone else was involved in *Bomberman* or *Street Fighter II Turbo* showdowns) as I started my first job at a videogame magazine. I clearly remember commissioning *Star Wars* poster artist John Alvin to paint an original image for *Star Wars: Obi-Wan* (later cancelled on PC) for my very first cover as an Editor-in-Chief at PC Gamer (May 2000, if you're counting).

Sitting proudly alongside these highlights of a 31 year odyssey of *Star Wars* involvement—personal, professional, defining, and just for fun—will be the day I got to play *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed.* Welcome, January 31st, 2008, to my fond memories. Despite this introduction, I'm not the hardcore *Star Wars* fanboy who besmirches magazines for getting a tangential character name wrong, or who dons costume and removes dignity in order to attend a public movie showing. But *Star Wars* games, done right, have a leg up by nature of their source material. I think after seeing what's planned for the latest incarnation in this post-movie world, you'll be as amped as I am to play the game. Jump to page 48 to see what the hell I'm talking about.

And please don't miss Teresa's insightful take on *God of War: Chains of Olympus.* As the biggest PSP game of the moment, anticipation was high, and she committed hours to completing the game and providing the definitive report.

We're lining up some impressive content for the months ahead as the PS3 gathers momentum and the games become must-haves for gamers of all persuasions. Will you remember where you were?

Rob

"Quote" contest

You hopefully know the drill. **Recognize the movie that the quote at the top of this page is taken from? If so, send your answer (along with your name and shipping address) to editor@psmonline.com, with 'Ed Note April' in the subject line.** I'll pick one lucky winner to receive a Blu-ray movie from the releases that have landed in the office that month. Congratulations go to Allen Adkins of Fort Leavenworth, KS, who identified last month's line from the incredible Terry Gilliam flick, *Brazil.*

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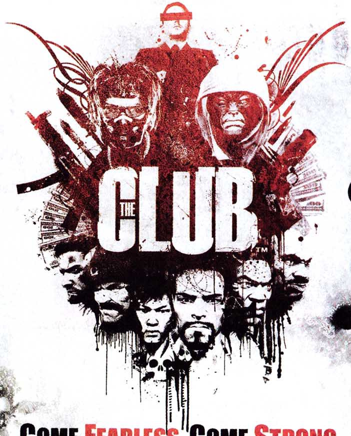
“THIS ACTION IS INTENSE, HEART POUNDING...”

–GAME INFORMER “8.7 OUT OF 10”



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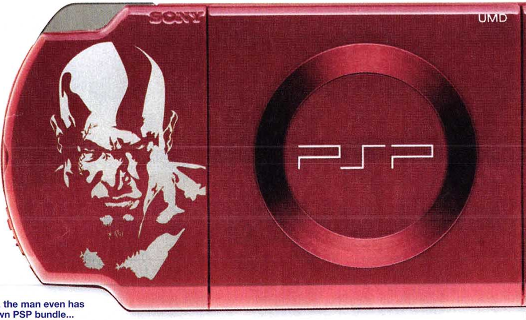
DEPT. OF HOT NEW STUFF

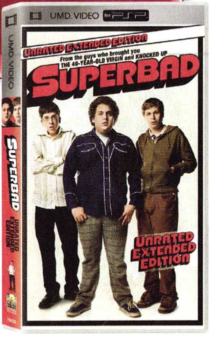
GOD OF WAR PSP BUNDLE COMING DOWN FROM OLYMPUS


SONY
UMD
PSP

Geez, the man even has his own PSP bundle... Can't Kratos smile? Just once? For us?

SONY
PSP
GOD OF WAR

That's right—we've got the scoop straight from the PSP team at SCEA. Everyone's favorite Greek anti-hero is going to have his own special red PSP soon—complete with an extremely cool silkscreen of his scowling visage on the back. In addition to the limited edition Kratos PSP, the *God of War* PSP Entertainment Pack will include the *God of War: Chains of Olympus* game and the UMD version of the hit comedy *Superbad*. The *God of War* bundle, scheduled to hit retailers in limited quantities in June, will carry a Mature rating and sport an MSRP of $199.99.


UMD VIDEO for PSP
UMD VIDEO
UNRATED EXTENDED EDITION
From the guys who brought you THE 40-YEAR-OLD VIRGIN and KNOCKED UP
SUPERBAD
UNRATED EXTENDED EDITION

UMDs

In an effort to revitalize the UMD, Sony has hopped into bed with MTV—which just means you'll now be able to purchase these MTV shows on UMD for $14.99 apiece:

- Beavis & Butt-head: The Mike Judge Collection, Vol. 2 and 3
- Jackass, Vol. 2 and 3
- Wildboyz, Vol. 1 and 2
- Viva La Bam, Vol. 2, 3, and 4
- Aeon Flux: The Complete Animated Collection (2 disc set)

SKYPE YOUR PSP

Armed with the PSP-2000 (PSP Slim, or whatever you're calling the new model), you can make calls using the Skype IP to IP "phone" system, which had been limited to technically savvy PC users up to this point. The 3.90 firmware update added Skype under the Network option on your XMB. You'll need the PSP-2000 headset and remote control, along with a Memory Stick Duo in your PSP, to download the Skype software (and you'll need to be connected to the internet, of course).

You need to set up a Skype account to use the system, but that's a painless process, and opens up free calling to the vast multitude of Skype users out there (around 276 million accounts are registered worldwide). In addition, you can use the Skype system to dial land lines and cell phones if you fund your account (payment options vary). The headset package costs $30 and the remote control $20 if you buy separately.

For all you "old school" PSP owners, note that the PSP-1000 system is not compatible with Skype. Maybe now you'll consider that cool *God of War* bundle even more enticing!

In practice, the service and system works very well. We enjoyed clear audio reception and fairly painless connections to the service.

11/14 23:39
skype
Sign In
Create New Skype Account

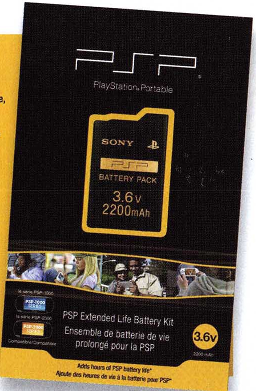
With the battery pack (below) and the Skype peripherals (above and right), your PSP could almost become a cell phone. Without the monthly bill, too!

Last Longer

Extended life battery pack.

Battery life has long been the bane of the handheld device, but if you need a little extra oomph, Sony's Extended Life Battery Kit could be just the ticket. For $45 the new battery boosts the estimated battery life of the PSP-2000 to 8-11 hours for gameplay and 5-8 hours for watching UMDs. According to the back of the packaging, that represents roughly a 20% increase over the original battery lifespan. Your mileage may vary. But hey, we all want to last a little longer, right?

SONY
PSP
BATTERY PACK
3.6v
2200mAh



PSP
PlayStation Portable
SONY
PSP
BATTERY PACK
3.6v
2200mAh
PSP-1000 SERIES
PSP-2000 SERIES
PSP Extended Life Battery Kit
Ensemble de batterie de vie prolongé pour la PSP
3.6v
2200 mAh
Adds hours of PSP battery life*
Ajoute des heures de vie à la batterie pour PSP*

Rush Assault Lv. 5

Top PSP Picks

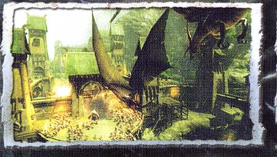
For those recently lured into the PSP scene by the slew of awesome upcoming PSP titles or the new features of the PSP-2000, we recommend starting your library with some of these sure-to-please games:

Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops ($19.99)
Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow ($39.99)
Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions ($39.99)
Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007 ($39.99)
Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords ($19.99)

And just for the heck of it:
Ridge Racer ($19.99)

THE GODS WILL
HAVE A WARRIOR
MANKIND WILL
HAVE A HERO
HE WILL SHOW
NO MERCY

Brutalize enemies with fire, ice and lightning attacks.



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"...an enormously promising title,
combining the sandbox design
of GTA with the battlefield action
of Dynasty Warriors, and intensity
of God of War."
-IGN

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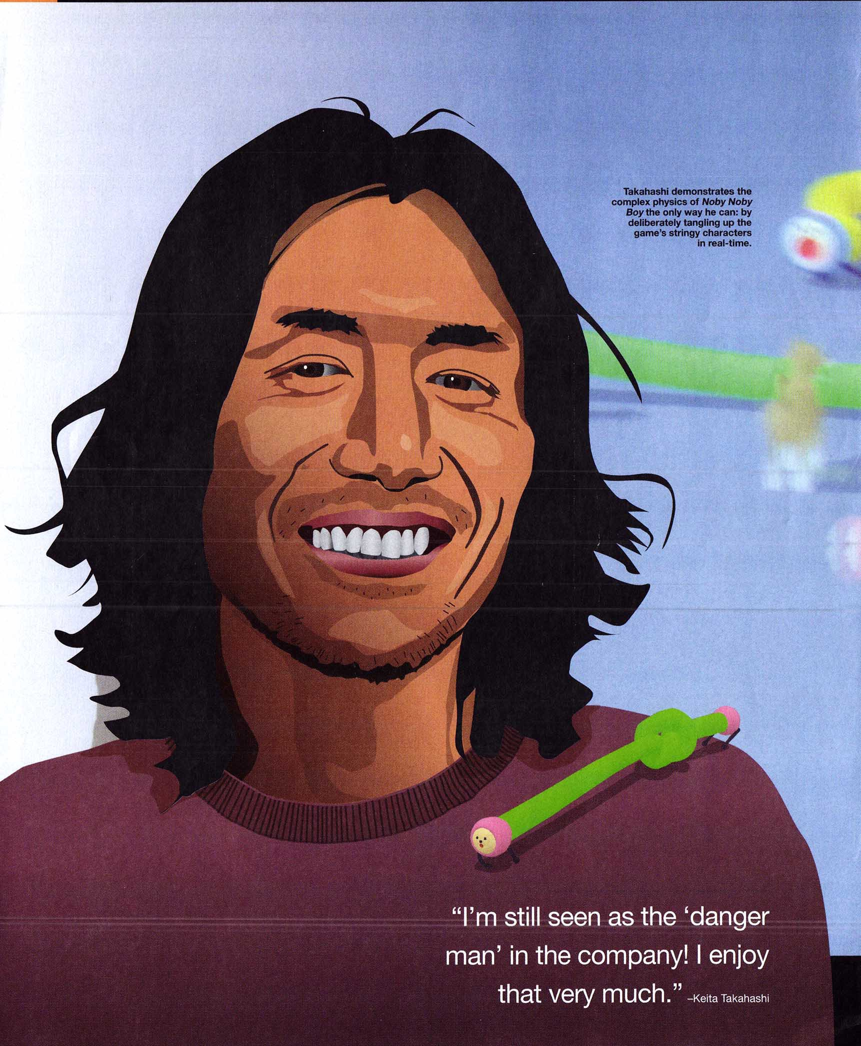
IN STORES
MARCH 27, 2008



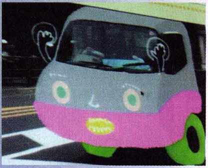
Takahashi demonstrates the complex physics of *Noby Noby Boy* the only way he can: by deliberately tangling up the game's stringy characters in real-time.

> "I'm still seen as the 'danger man' in the company! I enjoy that very much." –Keita Takahashi

OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW

KEITA TAKAHASHI

The creator of *Katamari* prepares his next fascinating game design, *Noby Noby Boy*, exclusively for PS3. We get the inside scoop on what to expect straight from the man himself.



Takahashi reflected on his game design philosophies before unveiling *Noby Noby Boy*. Here, he demonstrated that everything, even trucks, can look cute if you put your mind to it.

Keita Takahashi's debut title, the bizarre and brilliant *Katamari Damacy,* is a game that gets industry folk incredibly jealous. Making a name for yourself in the videogame business generally takes time. There's no guarantee that any developer will be personally well-known or widely respected even after a decade of blood, sweat, and tears.

Yet here we have a developer who produces one eccentric videogame—where a ball of junk is rolled over smaller bits of junk, becoming progressively bigger to roll over bigger junk, ad infinitum—and the game community declares their love for everything Takahashi. His willingness to discuss various topics with a candor uncommon among industry developers only enhances his profile.

Whether such popularity is deserved or not, it seems impossible not to be fascinated by the work and mind of Takahashi. He's a game director that isn't scared to express how stagnant some sectors of the game design business have become. He has openly criticized some games as being "tainted with the stink of big business," and always seems intent on imbuing his work with a unique artistic vision.

His attitude can be interpreted in one of two ways: the voice of the frustrated cynic or the rebellious battle cry of gaming's first punk. By either measure, the presence of such a raw, critical voice from within the industry is refreshing and unique.

We caught up with Keita recently following his keynote speech at the second annual GameCity event in Nottingham, UK, to discuss his new pet project, *Noby Noby Boy,* and sample some of his candid opinions on the state of the game industry.

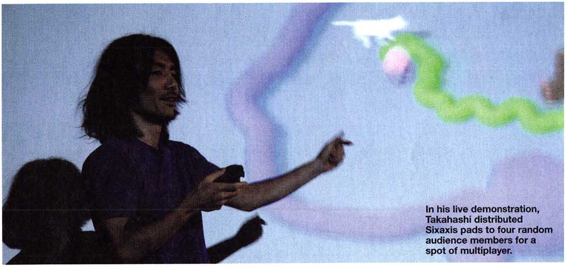
PTOM: During your first few years at Namco you were under pressure to attach yourself to certain projects, which you refused to do. Along with this, your initial pitches of *Katamari Damacy* were being rejected by your bosses at Namco. How has your position there evolved, now that you have made a name for yourself?

TAKAHASHI: Nothing has changed drastically, so far. I got a bit of pressure during my work on *Katamari Damacy,* but I have always put myself under pressure when trying to make something that I want people to like.

I suppose that because the *Katamari* series was successful for Namco Bandai, they have put a little less pressure on me with *Noby Noby Boy.* Which is good, as I put myself under enough pressure anyway. But mostly, things haven't changed since I joined Namco Bandai at least. People still don't understand my projects, and I'm still seen as the 'danger man' in the company! I still enjoy that very much.

Illustration by Ken Bousquet

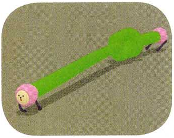
> "The PS3 has extensive network capabilities. I'm preparing *Noby Noby Boy* to utilize a lot of these features in a number of ways." —Keita Takahashi



In his live demonstration, Takahashi distributed Sixaxis pads to four random audience members for a spot of multiplayer.

What is *Noby Noby Boy?*

The central gameplay mechanics to Keita Takahashi's newest game appear very similar to that of *Katamari Damacy's*. Fundamentally, you're tasked with physically manipulating the game world in unique ways. In *Katamari Damacy*, the manipulation involved snowballing junk through a level. In *Noby Noby Boy*, the central character is an elastic tube (yes, you read that right) that can swallow farmyard animals, leap high into the air, and stretch its ends far out before snapping back together! Whether Takahashi pulls off the same inventive gameplay that scored so big with *Katamari* may take U.S. PS3 owners some time to find out as no release date has been set. But we fully expect Namco Bandai to do what's right after the game's Japanese release.



Noby Noby Boy's main character is a stretchy alien tube that can eat (and, er, exit) a range of unsuspecting farmyard animals. Even more bizarrely, it can jump over twenty times its height.

You've always made it clear that you have a strong distaste for over-similarity in games, yet *Noby Noby Boy* seems to take a very similar aesthetic approach to the *Katamari* games. Are you concerned with how similar they both look?

TAKAHASHI: I am very confident that both titles, when placed next to each other, will be seen as completely different. I feel that *Noby Noby Boy* is going to look like the more unique game and *Katamari* the more conventional one. This isn't just because of each game's aesthetics, but also because of how the game will feel and with what you can do in it.

When it comes to the visual style, there really has been no intention to make the artwork similar, but I do see how people may think it looks like *Katamari*. As more artwork on the game is released, I think people will easily be able to set the two apart.

In your demonstration of *Noby Noby Boy* at GameCity, you passed game pads to audience members and briefly played a cooperative game of sorts. Do you feel that *Noby Noby Boy's* potential will be best met in multiplayer and online gaming?

TAKAHASHI: (Takes a long pause) I can't go into too many details at the moment, but as you know the PS3 has extensive network capabilities. I'm preparing *Noby Noby Boy* to utilize a lot of these features in a number of ways. Sadly, I can't really go into that right now, sorry!

Considering that *Noby Noby Boy* utilizes a complex physics system that would have been of limited use on the PS2, it does beg the question, when did you actually conceive the idea for the game?

TAKAHASHI: The initial idea of *Noby Noby Boy* actually started when I was working on *We ♥ Katamari*. At the time, I realized the PS2's processor speed wasn't up to what I wanted it to do, so as soon as I saw the specifications for the PS3 I realized that it would be the ideal platform to play it on.

Something similar to *Noby Noby Boy* might have worked on the PS2 I suppose, but I don't think it would be able to hold the scale and physics of the game very well, and its network capabilities were limited also.

Considering your background and well-known interests in sculpture art, how much of *Katamari Damacy* was your own personal artistic expression, as opposed to a toy for everyone to play with?

TAKAHASHI: There is a different goal behind every game and there is a different objective behind different entertainment mediums. Personally, I feel that the games I make are not exactly an artistic expression, but more an end result of what I see will best fit in the games market itself.

You've also made it clear in the past that you loathe violence in videogames, but do you think violence has any place in gaming?

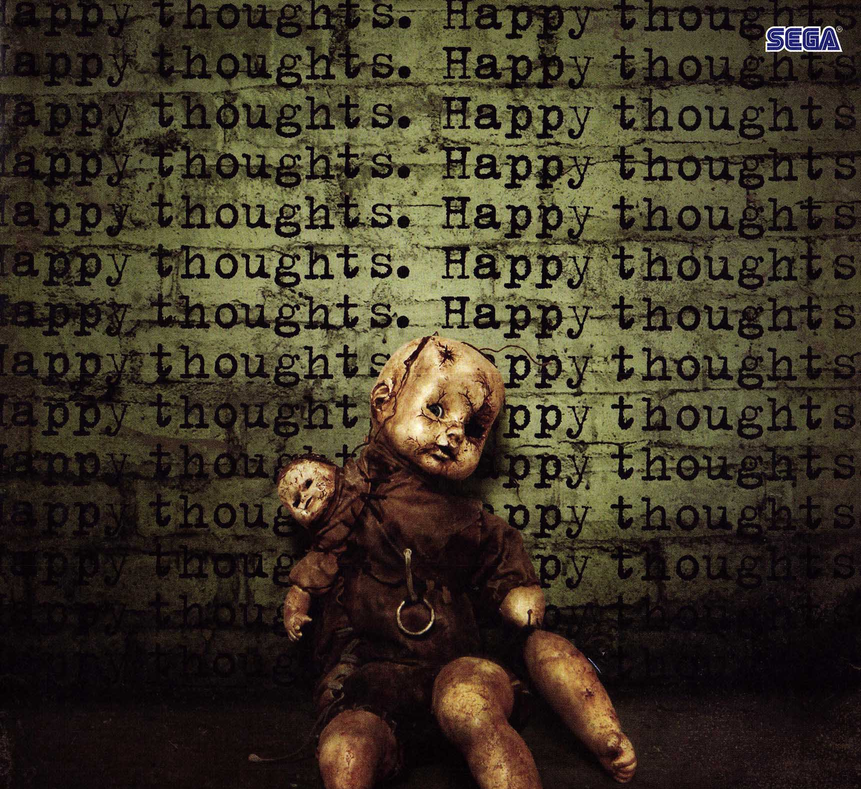
TAKAHASHI: I understand the need of violence to a degree, and I won't deny the fact that the world we live in is often a violent one. To recreate this violence in a videogame is something that I can understand to an extent; it is a recreation of one the most striking things that happen to people every day.

But, I do feel that an indulgence with violence in developing a videogame will limit the developers. So there is some space, there is some place for violent videogames, and I don't think they all should be censored just for being violent. I just think that violence limits the developer's ideas on how to grab an audience, and can quickly make a game look samey [sic].

It's not like you've had the smoothest career so far. How do you think you have achieved your goals in the face of such adversity?

TAKAHASHI: Being confident is a key aspect—believing in yourself. If you think you have a good idea and it is rejected, keep on trying with it, keep on pushing it as far as it can go. No one will understand your pitch in one day, so just keep showing them your ideas, showing them your pictures and diagrams of what your idea is all about. And if you believe in the game, never take no for an answer!

If you keep on pushing your idea, one day someone will understand it, which is exactly what happened to me with *Katamari*. The game really struggled to get off the ground and no one could really see my idea, so I looked for better ways of explaining it. If you are confident in yourself and never give up then things are bound to go well for you, I feel that is the same with any career, and even in life. △○✕□


SEGA
appy thoughts. Happy thoughts
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CONDEMNED 2: BLOODSHOT™

condemnedgame.com

MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Use of Drugs and Alcohol
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360 LIVE MONOLITH WB GAMES

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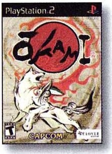
PlayStation Digest

Top Stories, Industry Bits, and Oddities

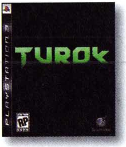
Developer's Talk: Creating Games for the PS3

Electronic Arts CEO John Riccitiello said in an EA investor conference call that his company "had some challenges essentially meeting the technical specifications effectively on the PlayStation 3." He also said, "Games where we essentially led development on the PS3 platform... we had no issue at all. But, in circumstances where we either led with the Xbox 360 or we ran parallel production, for the most part, we're still experiencing some delay on the PS3."

From tales of knife-wielding killers hiding in the backseats of cars to so-called factual statistics about the number of spiders people swallow in their sleep, urban legends abound. But what about the claim that developing games for the PS3 is so frustrating that it's the cause behind many recent game delays? Is that hard-boiled fact or internet-spun fiction? Read what these developers have to say about working their magic on the PS3.



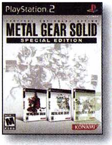
When Atsushi Inaba, the producer of *Okami* and *God Hand*, was asked by 1up.com which console he preferred to develop for, he gave an evasive answer: "To be honest, if we're going to consider the Western market, we should be thinking of creating a game on the 360; however, the 360 is not doing that good in Japan, and we're a Japanese studio... So OK, what about PS3? Well, how well the PS3 is doing is still kind of vague, you don't know where to go with PS3. Now let's look at Wii. Wii has a huge market, but are there real game titles that are popular on Wii? And the answer is no, there are no real titles out there yet. So right now the consumer machines are in a very not-clear stage. I wish that there was just one platform, one winning platform that we could concentrate on."



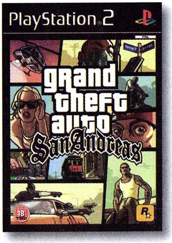
"General opinion on the PS3 is that if your code is written in such a way that it's structured for the PS3 and the Cell processor, then you have no big issues," says Josh Holmes, co-founder of Propaganda Games *(Turok)*, in an interview with Gamasutra. By focusing on PS3 development first, and then translating the code to the Xbox 360, Holmes believes "the problems might actually go away. I think as we see second- or third-generation games on the consoles, we'll see a lot of the issues ironed out. It's kind of unfair to compare second-generation 360 titles with first-generation PlayStation 3 titles and say, 'Hey, why aren't they equally strong?'"

In terms of Massively Multiplayer Online games, **NCsoft North America President Chris Chung** recently told GameDaily, "Ultimately, we have to really optimize for consoles; we have to create an experience that's suited for the [PS3] and supports the MMO element. I think the shift is inevitable; real-time strategy is one of the last PC genres moving onto consoles, and I think we'll see a similar trend for online games as well." The South Korean developer is widely hailed for its MMORPGs *(Guild Wars; Lineage)* and recently signed an exclusive deal with Sony. Will we soon be seeing our first PS3 MMORPG?

Catching Up with Solid Snake



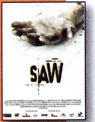
To prepare for the upcoming *Metal Gear Solid 4*, wouldn't it be nice to replay some of the series' classics? That must've been what Konami was thinking when it announced a *MGS* bundle, *Metal Gear Solid: The Essential Collection*. It'll include the original *Metal Gear Solid* for the PlayStation, *Metal Gear Solid 2* (director's cut), *Metal Gear Solid 3*, and some artwork by Yoji Shinkawa. It's not like we needed an excuse to fill our lives with more Snake, but at $29.99, this deal actually has us drooling.



Exchange Hot Coffee for some Cool Cash

If you were offended by the infamous "Hot Coffee" mod that could be unlocked in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, you could pocket up to 35 bucks... provided you have sufficient proof of your purchase. If not, you might still be eligible for at least five dollars from Take Two Interactive's class action settlement. Check out www.gtasettlement.com for details.

Face-off with the Jigsaw Killer



Come October 2009 (with the release of *Saw VI)*, you'll be able to interact with the Jigsaw Killer on a personal level... in a slated PS3 release of the *Saw* videogame by Brash Entertainment. The game will feature its own storyline and answer the head-scratching questions the film left you with (or so they want us to believe). If you're a fan of the series, you'd better start bracing yourself for the tests to begin.

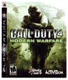
TOP10LIST

What we're playing, watching, reading, and absorbing in the world of entertainment this month.

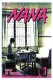
Dexter | TV Show | Free
Michael C. Hall *(Six Feet Under)* is a blood spatter expert with Miami forensics trying to solve gruesome murders. But at night, he's a serial killer himself, "taking out the trash" when the bad guys elude the justice system. Body parts wrapped up like rump roasts. Yuck. Watch discreetly.

Ipod Nano 3rd Gen | Device | $149
The best device to watch shows that no one else wants to see (like hours of European soccer news) or when you're hiding in bed supposedly sick. Those Apple guys are awesome. (But now we know what you were doing on all those "sick days," Ken!)

Revolver, by the Beatles | Music | $35
With songs like "Here, There and Everywhere" (Paul), "I'm Only Sleeping" (John), and "Taxman" (George), we listen to this album to immerse ourselves in quintessential Beatles goodness starring all the important Beatles (sorry Ringo!). If you see Beatles lyrics sneak into the magazine, this is why.



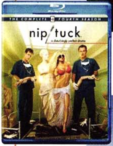
Call of Duty 4 Online Multiplayer | Game | $60
After our failed Game Night attempt on Jan. 23 (we were there, but we couldn't find our readers!), we've been sneaking in sessions of *Call of Duty 4* multiplayer when Rob isn't looking! Must… rank… up… and earn more perks!



Nana | Manga | $9
A Japanese comic drenched with drama, *Nana* features two twenty-year-old women with the same name who meet in Tokyo and become roommates. One Nana wants to be a punk rock singer; the other just wants to overcome her boy crazy past. Yes, Teresa picked this one, but she insists it's really, really good!

Golden State Warriors | Sports Team | N/A
Run and gun fun takes Roger to his happy place. Now that (astonishingly) Chris Webber is back, we expect great things out of the Warriors. Time to open our wallets and place our bets? Nah, we would never participate in that type of shady activity. Never. Nope. Not Vegas-lovin' us.

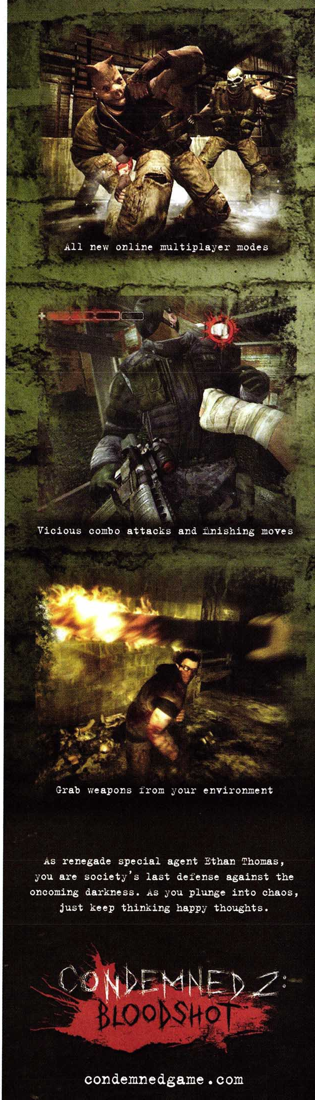
Cloverfield | Film | $10
More style than substance, we still found *Cloverfield* intense and well done. Yes, it did induce motion sickness, but it was a fascinating experiment in cinematography and storytelling. We had to use our popcorn cups as barf bags, though.



Nip/Tuck – The Complete Fourth Season | Blu-ray | $80
This trashy slasher from FX Network really cuts to the chase: sex, drugs, and plastic surgery in Miami. Two plastic surgeons work together, sleep with patients and each other's girlfriends and ex-wives, and they still somehow manage to stay pals. It's tacky, indulgent, and hard to resist.

Snowboarding at Lake Tahoe | Activity | $150
Here in the Bay Area, we've had a tumultuous winter (by California standards anyway) full of fog, rain, and thunder—all stuff we softie Californians aren't accustomed to. The awesome tradeoff was a great snow season up at beautiful Lake Tahoe.

PixelJunk Monsters | PSN Game | $8
Building towers to defend your home has never been so simple and yet so very, very challenging! We reviewed this game a while back (we recommended it, by the way, and still do), and we're revisiting it now that it's been officially released. So, so tough, yet so very addicting.



All new online multiplayer modes

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Grab weapons from your environment

As renegade special agent Ethan Thomas, you are society's last defense against the oncoming darkness. As you plunge into chaos, just keep thinking happy thoughts.

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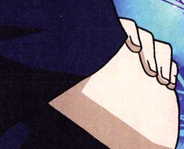

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97
NARUTO
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Alcohol Reference
Animated Blood
Cartoon Violence
Simulated Gambling
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation®2

VIZ media

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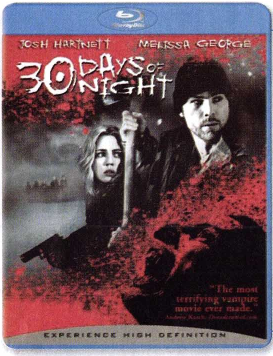
Blu-ray Central

What's new to Blu-ray this month


Josh Hartnett
Melissa George
30 Days of Night
"The most terrifying vampire movie ever made."
Experience High Definition

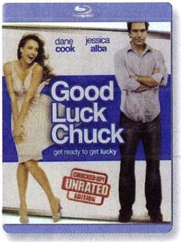
PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH

30 Days of Night

PRICE: $38.96 **RATED:** R

Sam Raimi's Ghost House Pictures hasn't been known for quality scares, but they've hit horror gold with *30 Days of Night.* Based on the first volume of Steve Niles' ever-expanding graphic novel centered around the vampire mythos, *Night* is everything a good monster movie should be. Niles' vision of vampires is an unredeemably foul and feral creature. They kill for sport and pleasure even more than to feed, and in the month-long blackout of Barrow, Alaska, these fiends have found a gruesome, carnage-filled amusement park. The thrills and terror are genuine, the direction skillful, and the choices the humans make to survive disturbing. In a cinematic wasteland filled with pointless torture porn and moron-level slasher flicks, *30 Days of Night* is one of the few good horror movies to hit U.S. theaters in a long time. Though somewhat light on extras—the lack of commentary from the director and Niles is especially disappointing—the HD treatment is amazing. The audio is superbly effective and the picture quality is superb.

MOVIES ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★

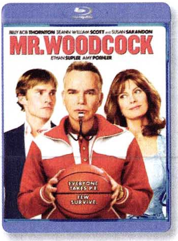

dane cook
jessica alba
Good Luck Chuck
get ready to get lucky
Unrated Edition

Good Luck Chuck

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R/UNRATED

A strangely sincere and even sweet sex comedy, with some major failings around the midsection, *Good Luck Chuck* manages to portray Dane Cook as a likeable oaf that women everywhere want to have sex with. The movie is outrageously blatant and nearly pornographic during the great build-up, but loses steam once Chuck focuses on Jessica Alba. Still, if you like outrageous comedies with lots of T&A, there are far worse choices.

MOVIES ★★★
EXTRAS ★★

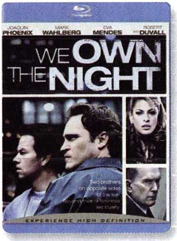

Billy Bob Thornton Seann William Scott and Susan Sarandon
Mr. Woodcock
Ethan Suplee Amy Poehler
Everyone takes P.E. Few survive.

Mr. Woodcock

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** PG-13

We've already seen that Billy Bob can play a mean SOB exceedingly well, so it's no stretch to imagine him as a junior high school gym teacher. Thornton's role is probably the only thing that really works in this train wreck of an overlong and awful sitcom. Full of by-the-numbers gags, inane characters, and flat jokes, *Mr. Woodcock* doesn't have a hope of being redeemable.

MOVIES ★
EXTRAS ★★


Joaquin Phoenix
Mark Wahlberg
Eva Mendes
Robert Duvall
We Own the Night
Experience High Definition

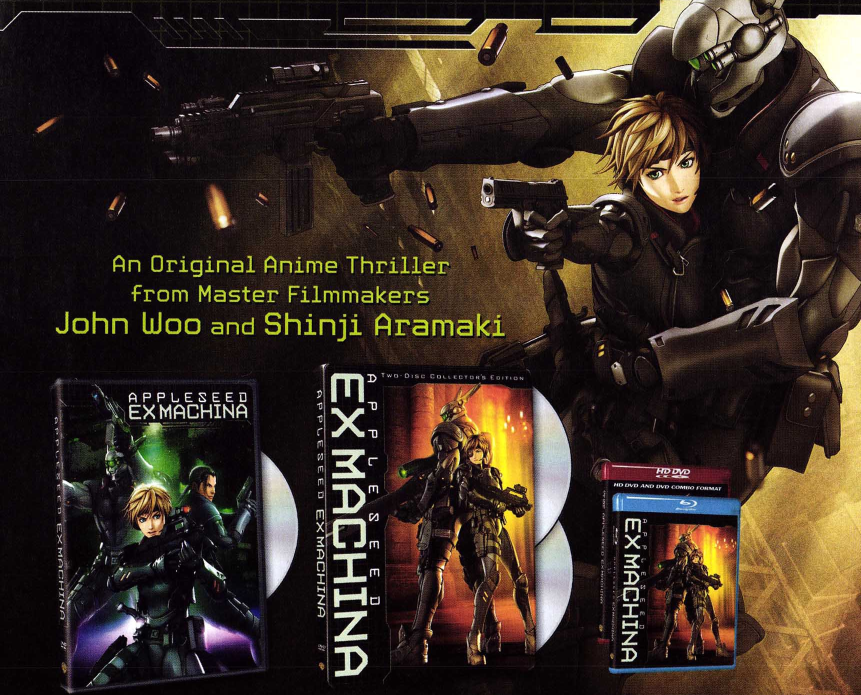
We Own the Night

PRICE: $38.96 **RATED:** R

Given its stellar cast and great performances, it's easy to want to love *We Own the Night.* Robert Duvall, Joaquin Phoenix, Mark Wahlberg, and Eva Mendes are all worth watching, yet the plodding pace of the movie and some unrealistic turns make the story hard to sit through. The director is clearly trying to channel Scorsese or DePalma, and had the script been tighter and the action a bit more frequent, he might have gotten there.

MOVIES ★★
EXTRAS ★★★

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE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PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
Action/Violence and Brief Strong Language

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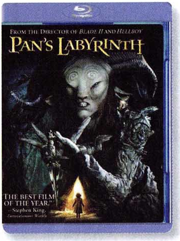
Blu-ray Central

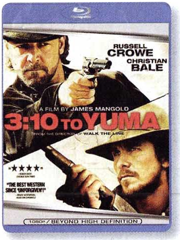

From the Director of Blade II and Hellboy
Pan's Labyrinth
"The best film of the year." —Stephen King, Entertainment Weekly

Pan's Labyrinth

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** PG-13

If you're familiar with Guillermo Del Toro's Spanish body of work, *Pan's Labyrinth* is familiar territory. Taking its cue from the director's beautifully haunting ghost story, *The Devil's Backbone,* anyone expecting *Alice in Wonderland* or *MirrorMask* will be sorely surprised. Del Toro has never shirked from showing us that man is always the worst sort of monster; and here, he does so more harshly and violently than ever. Uncompromising in its look at blind hatred, the movie is at once a story of a scared little girl who unlocks a magical world that may very well be purely imaginative, and a brutal civil war. If there's a disappointment in the movie, it's simply that precious little of the incredible Labyrinth world is really shown.

MOVIES ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★

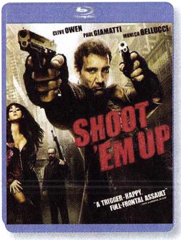

Russell Crowe
Christian Bale
A film by James Mangold
3:10 to Yuma
From the director of Walk the Line
★★★★
"The best western since Unforgiven!"
1080p / Beyond High Definition

3:10 to Yuma

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

Saying *3:10 to Yuma* is one of the best westerns in years doesn't mean much considering how rarely the genre is trotted out these days. So, instead consider that it manages to stand up with some of the best westerns in modern memory—say, *Unforgiven, Tombstone,* and *Open Range.* Certainly not a feel-good movie, *Yuma* gets by on pitch-perfect performances from the entire cast, but especially Christian Bale as a crippled rancher determined to make his son proud, and Crowe as the surprisingly intelligent and eloquent outlaw. The dialogue is consistently smart and the HD transfer exceptional.

MOVIES ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★


Clive Owen
Paul Giamatti
Monica Bellucci
Shoot 'Em Up
"A trigger-happy, full-frontal assault"

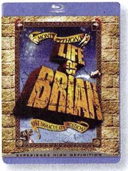
Shoot 'Em Up

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

It's as if a bunch of guys got together and said, "We want to do one of those action movies where the good guy hits everything he aims at, and, oh yeah, we'll break the gun fights up occasionally by having him kill someone with a carrot!" The most aptly named movie of the past year, *Shoot 'Em Up* isn't for everyone, but for a pure, mindless thrill ride, it's brilliantly stupid. Clive Owen is great and Monica Belluci is beyond gorgeous. Add in Paul Giamatti as a crazy hitman and insanely improbable action sequences just to make things better. It out-cranks *Crank,* and puts most other action movies in recent years to shame.

MOVIES ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

CLASSIC SPOTLIGHT

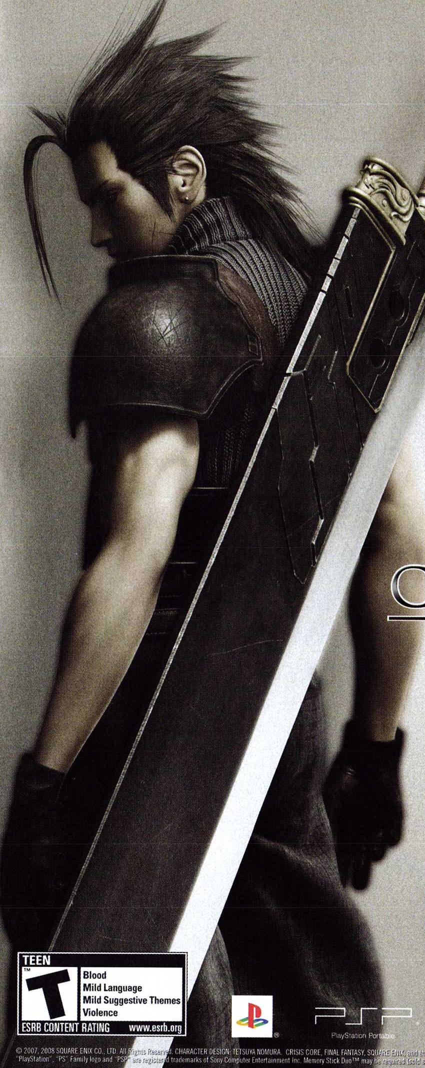

Monty Python's
Life of Brian
The Immaculate Edition
Experience High Definition

Monty Python's Life of Brian – The Immaculate Edition

PRICE: $28.95 **RATED:** R

The venerable British sketch comedy classic hits Blu-ray with surprisingly adept results. For a movie made entirely on the cheap, it looks remarkably good, if far from pristine. While Python fans tend to swallow everything the troupe did with a near religious fervor, for anyone else, *Brian* is really just a series of hit or miss gags circling a brilliant idea. The jokes work more often than not though, and there are enough truly hilarious scenes to make it a worthy addition to your HD library.

MOVIES ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★★



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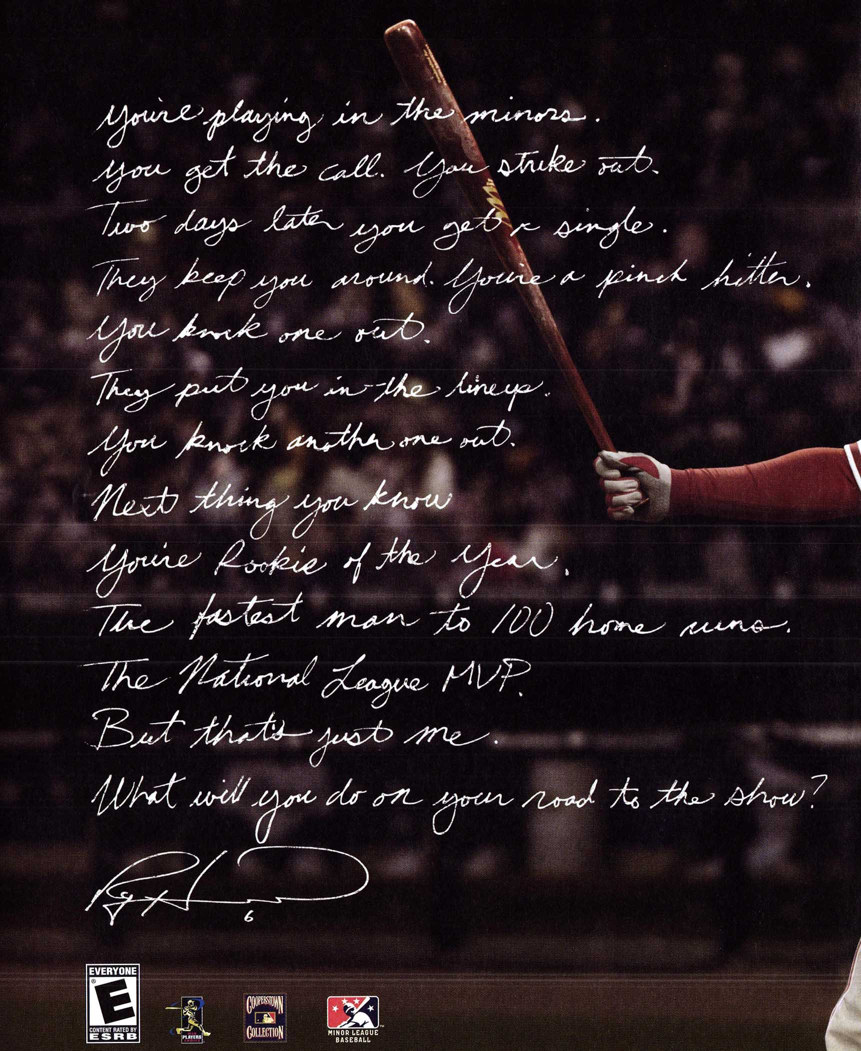

Youre playing in the minors.
You get the call. You strike out.
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You knock one out.
They put you in the lineup.
You knock another one out.
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The National League MVP.
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MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

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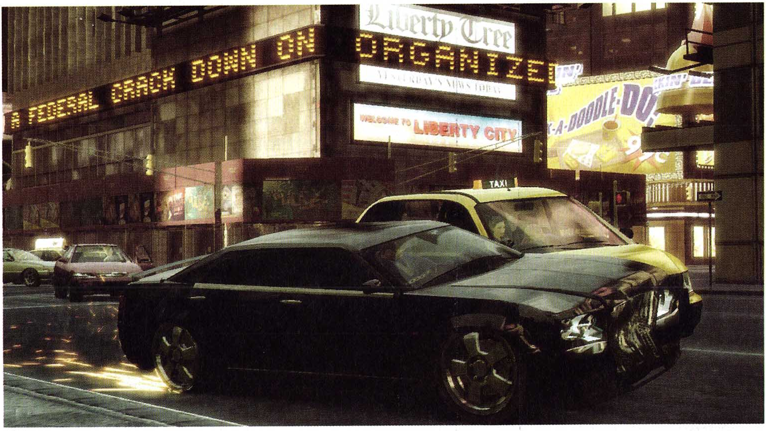


Though the entire city is open from the outset, you can't freely travel everywhere. If you head into a borough that you're not yet ready for, you'll instantly get five stars, sending all manner of police after you. (The fiction behind this is that you don't have naturalization papers and are considered a terrorist threat.)

Multiplayer details are still firmly under wraps... at least until next issue, so we hope.

PS3 | P

Grand Theft Auto IV

Hands On Preview

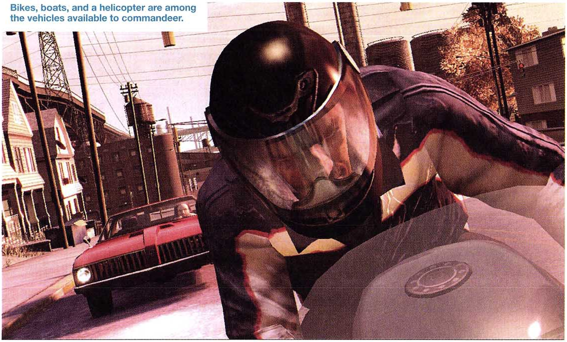
All-new Liberty City is getting ready to open for business

PS3 AVAILABLE: April 29,2008 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games DEVELOPER: Rockstar North

As expected, the radio stations provide a vast range of music for all listening tastes, but the signature chatter of the radio talk show hosts is also incredibly funny. We hailed a cab, got in, and told the guy where we wanted to go, but instead of skipping ahead to the destination, we decided to enjoy the ride and actually listened to the high quality comedic dialogue.

It's unusual for Rockstar to let us get hands-on with their upcoming games before review time. For a company that controls the release of information about its premiere *Grand Theft Auto* franchise as tightly as any in the industry, hands-on access is a surprise. Are they concerned? Trying to curry some favor in a controlled environment before the game's release? Ah, the cynical game journalist could spin conspiratorial about this with ease.

No fear. Breezing through just a couple of missions from the earlier part of the game, we got two clear impressions: First, as indicated by the original trailer release, this time things definitely are different; and second that the gameplay style remains decidedly familiar. The differences stand out immediately in the visuals—this next-gen Liberty City looks spectacular. From the moment we got control of east European immigrant Nico Bellic we just wanted to look around, to stare at the perfectly textured walls, gaze over the vistas of tree-spotted parks, tall and short buildings, and bridges connecting the stylized boroughs of Liberty City. On the technical side, *GTA IV* uses the euphoria engine (as does our cover story game, *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed),* which is used here to add subtle, but realistic details to the game world. Nico will ascend a curb, his feet independently and accurately stepping up. After gunning down a random bystander (just to test out the lock-on targeting system, see the new circular health display, and check the accuracy of the assault rifle) you can stand over the body, one foot up on the carcass like some rum commercial actor proving he has a little captain in him. The tiny detail is indicative of the flurry of subtleties that bring this latest

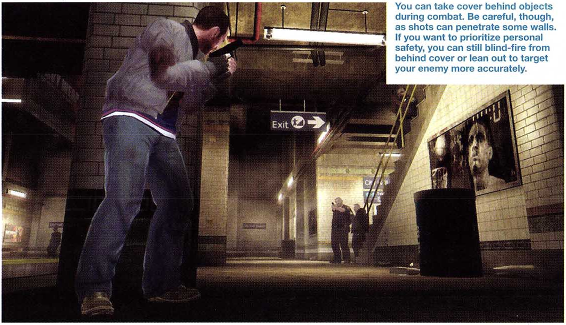


Bikes, boats, and a helicopter are among the vehicles available to commandeer.

incarnation of Liberty City to life. Pedestrians have seemingly thousands of lines of dialogue; they'll react with their hands, pushing out against your car if you drive by slowly. Billboards and neon signs add flair and flavor to each scene.

Just examining Liberty City will likely occupy the opening hours (though Rockstar remains adamantly tight-lipped about how the game starts for real; VP of Development Jeronimo Barrera only offered a suggestive "it sets up your position as an immigrant"). It was readily apparent right from the get-go that the core gameplay mechanic of jacking cars, talking to acquaintances, and taking on missions remain familiarly *GTA.* We met Little Jacob, a spliff-smoking Jamaican (smash the car window as you drive him on a mission and the smoke billows out) who becomes one of your first contacts. His thick accent was difficult to understand, but you can choose to have the subtitles on all the time to ensure you don't miss an important detail. Pull up your cell phone and you can call LJ and others you meet along the way. You'll also get calls, initially from your buddy Roman who's the main reason you're in the country, with job offers. The cast of characters was guesstimated at being in the hundreds by Jeronimo, each one seemed specifically defined, with their own motivations and realistic responses.

While the gameplay format sounds similar to past *GTA* experiences (let's face it, what's wrong with that notion?), Rockstar is promising a much deeper, more involved experience with Nico. "We're trying to create interactive experiences that are not hollow dribble," says Jeronimo. In one dynamic situation, we failed in our mission to chase down and



You can take cover behind objects during combat. Be careful, though, as shots can penetrate some walls. If you want to prioritize personal safety, you can still blind-fire from behind cover or lean out to target your enemy more accurately.

The Arsenal

We got to try out several of the game's available weapons:

Fists: Classic street pugilism is pretty effective against random street thugs. By locking on to a target, you can aim punches at the head and body.

Knife: One slash across the face was enough to drop a bad guy.

Pistol: From the lock-on targeting you can adjust the exact aim with the right trigger. Getting a head shot is a one-shot kill, but obviously requires a bit more skill.

Uzi: Never gets old, spraying bullets with this one-handed auto.

Assault rifle: The classic rifle will get pedestrians running for cover if you walk around the streets with this in hand.

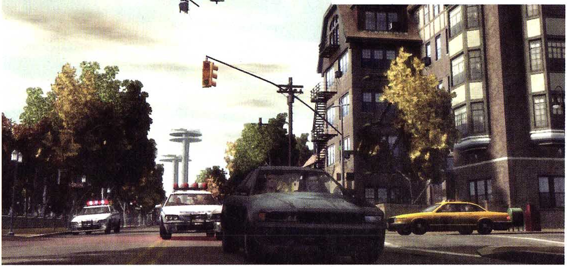
Sniper rifle: One mission involved us following a buddy (Paulie) to the docks where we climbed on the roof of a warehouse and zoomed in on enemies to pick them off. (Our first real indication of the verticality of the game world, where tall buildings will provide great opportunities to throw bad guys to their deaths!)

Rocket launcher: Pesky police helicopters don't expect guys on the ground to wield rocket launchers. Send a rocket spiraling into the sky and down comes the chopper in a glowing orange ball of flame. When the chopper lands and explodes it can set off a chain reaction of fireballs from other vehicles it may hit.

Molotov cocktail: For fun, we lobbed one under a car, which duly exploded, and caused more explosions. We then dialed 911 on the cell phone and called the fire department. When they arrived, we stole the fire truck… and drove down the street shooting the water cannon perched on top at whoever looked like they need a shower!

take out a drug dealer, and in the process caused a pile-up of cars on a bridge. As police sirens wailed, we jumped out of our trapped vehicle, and leapt over the side of the bridge into the water. This wasn't such a great idea as we weren't going to be able to swim fast enough to lose the police helicopter hovering overhead. We finally got nailed as the boat we were hoping to jack for a getaway turned out to be the Coast Guard. So many talking points were packed into just a few seconds of gameplay.

Wearing a seatbelt doesn't appear to be an option as we hit a wall at speed, saw Nico hurl through the windshield, and land about 50 feet down the street. Ouch.



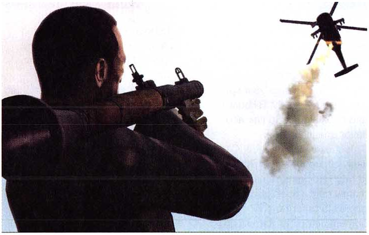
The game tracks a vast number of stats that will probably be used to reward accomplishments.

Elephants in the Room

"We want to do things that elevate our industry," says Jeronimo of the team's bold aspirations. That's a challenge when the mainstream media spotlight will shine brighter than ever on *GTA IV's* release. Jeronimo admitted that Rockstar was expecting scrutiny from the usual suspects, but the main arguments of playing in a game world apply as much today as they did when *GTA* first attracted wannabe politician and lawyer spotlight-seekers. "No market research is going in to this thing…" says Jeronimo of the game design mentality, "this is a bunch of Scots who love open world games." The violence factor could be a bigger issue this time around since the world is so much more realistically realized. But that will be for time to tell and headline-grabbing pundits to make happen.

The other significant elephant in the *GTA* room is the widely-reported issue of PlayStation 3 technology quirks causing the delay from its original October release. According to Jeronimo those issues have been resolved. Sony has had its technicians ("they actually wear white lab coats," he told us, and he didn't seem to be joking) helping out, and the game now plays with great visual fidelity on PS3. In addition, though post-release downloadable content has been promised on that other platform, expect similar offerings on the PS3 down the road, "we want this game to last for years," Jeronimo added, "I'm sure we'll do another [*GTA* game] some time in the future, but this one is built to last."

The familiar feel of the core gameplay devices was actually refreshing. The voice acting in the few cutscenes we saw was excellent, clearly M-rated (dropping more f-bombs than we expected, in fact), and superbly written. Veterans of the past games will instantly feel the difference in the weightier physics in the car handling, but locating and leaping off stunt ramps remains an innate part of the gameplay. (A cinematic camera option also lets you select an aerial or wheel-level camera perspective to view your actions.) The visual style and incredible depth we witnessed at every turn indicate an experience that really is something different. While we weren't expecting anything less, we can now safely claim that we *really* can't wait for the April 29th release. Rob Smith



Access the map and you can set waypoints to your destination. An onscreen mini-map then provides handy GPS directions to guide you to the location. Amusingly, more expensive cars have voice-driven GPS systems that politely inform you of the turns to make before 'dinging' at your destination.

This shouldn't be funny, but a poor motorist staggered from his burning car, engulfed in flames. After a few seconds the flames on him subsided. Seemingly safe, he stood up, only for the car to explode, propelling him many feet away. Just watching that dynamic event illustrated the fascinating depth of options and creativity at work in this utterly convincing game world.

Call the Cops

We nabbed a police car in the middle of a huge firefight, and discovered access to the police computer. Like the internet cafes dotted around the city that let you get messages and check websites, this connected world extends to the police department. You can get missions from finding information on the computer, get details on criminals, upload photos, and more. A simple interface lets you navigate through the options, and bring up all manner of information. It made us wonder what else we'd find just by exploring the city and trying out every vehicle.

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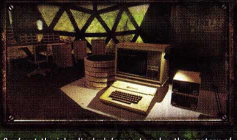

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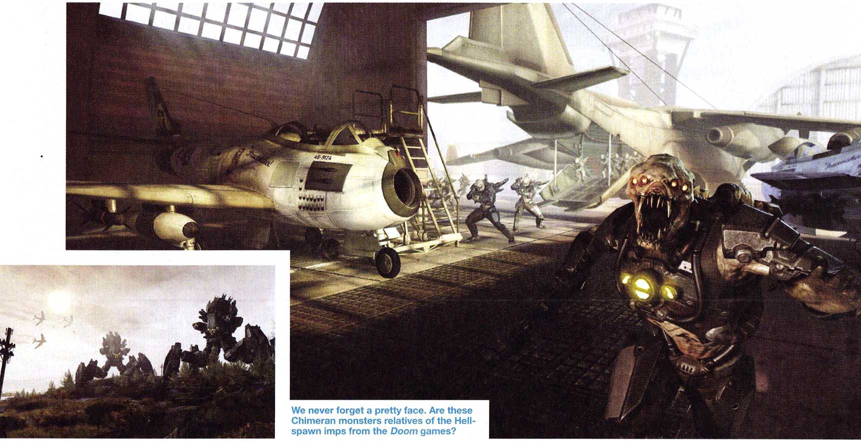


We never forget a pretty face. Are these Chimeran monsters relatives of the Hell-spawn imps from the *Doom* games?

Resistance 2

First Look Preview

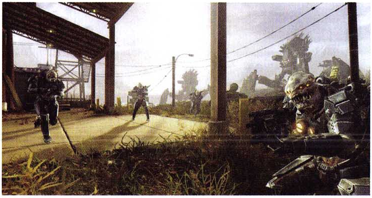
The primo platform-exclusive shooter preps a groundbreaking sequel

PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2008 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games

PS3 | P

Of the PlayStation 3 launch games, *Resistance: Fall of Man* was the most critically successful. The hard-edged alternate universe game laid the ideal foundation for a franchise that could dominate the platform-exclusive shooter sphere for the machine's entire lifespan. *Resistance 2* sounds like a sequel, squared. Cubed, even.

Three distinct components will provide a variety of ways to engage the invading Chimerans: the single-player campaign, picking up protagonist Hale's story from the first game; the eight-player co-op campaign that tells a whole new part of the story; and the 60-player mass scale multiplayer. That's right—eight-player co-op, and 60-player multiplayer.



If it weren't for the invading alien forces, this would be a pretty world to visit.

Details beyond these top line features are scant, but we did get Insomniac CEO and Founder Ted Price to field some preliminary questions. We've left in Price's "No comment"-type answers purely to illustrate the questions we asked, and to help set the stage for the information that will be coming to a PlayStation: The Official Magazine story soon!

In the first game, while controlling Hale, Rachel Parker directed traffic with the narrative. Will *Resistance 2* use the same mechanic? If not, what are some of the reasons behind changing it up?

TED PRICE: First, *Resistance 2* will be told 100% from Hale's perspective. Second, there will be no narrator. We moved away from the narrative approach of *Resistance: FoM* because we wanted a greater focus on Hale.

The game starts aboard a crashing helicopter in Iceland, but begins for real in San Francisco, correct? Can we expect to see familiar landmarks (from the game's 1950s time period), like the Golden Gate Bridge?

TP: That's basically correct. Hale makes it to Iceland in a VTOL craft (not a helicopter), and we'll see recognizable landmarks throughout the game. But we're not being any more specific than that right now because we don't want to give too much away.

Since game designers are their own biggest critics, what specific areas of the original design were the ones that you most wanted to focus on addressing for *Resistance 2,* and what have you tweaked or adjusted to make them happen?

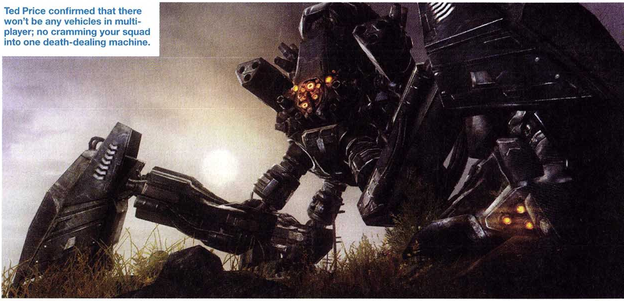
TP: We got plenty of feedback on *Resistance: Fall of Man.* And a lot of time the complaints we heard lined up with things we already wanted to improve. For example we're creating a more explosive opening level, we're changing the health system, and we're adding online co-op.

Since the Chimeran invasion happens as an aerial bombardment of the U.S. will you have the opportunity to take the fight to them in the skies?
TP: Good question. We'll answer this is in a few months.

What are the game design mechanics behind creating what you described as the "sense of despair" in the game world?
TP: Creating this sense of despair—this feeling of being in a situation where the world is collapsing—has a lot to do with integrating *Resistance 2's* bleak story with gameplay. Since *Resistance: FoM,* we've learned a lot about better ways of melding the two and having what you're doing in the game help to tell the story. Historically we've tended to keep the two pretty separate because it's much easier to design setups when you don't really have to worry about what else is occurring in the larger story. But with *Resistance 2* we've made a conscious effort to reinforce what's going on in the world through in-game dialogue, real time events, enemy actions, specific artistic call-outs, ambient sounds, etc.

A separate, independent online co-op campaign for up to eight players sounds amazing. If I jump into that co-op, can I invite friends in to my save point of the game? If I join them will I join at their save point? Can you save anywhere in co-op if I happen to drop out, for example?
TP: We'll be revealing many more details over the next few months. Sorry—not ready to give it all away yet.

Are there branching paths in the co-op so I can play it one way with one group, then apply different tactics for a different result on another play through?
TP: When you have eight players banding together to tackle complex challenges it's inevitable that every time you play through, the game will feel different. Plus the co-op areas are pretty open physically—there is a lot of opportunity to try out different tactics with your friends.

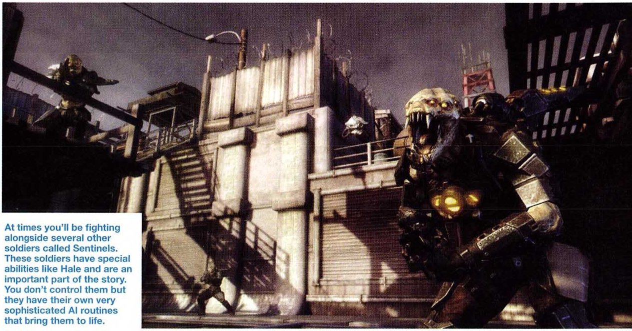

Ted Price confirmed that there won't be any vehicles in multiplayer; no cramming your squad into one death-dealing machine.

Can you outline the different play experience you expect from those playing the co-op as the tank, the special ops, or the medicator classes?
TP: The tank should definitely be on the front lines. If you like wielding heavy firepower, this is the class for you. The special ops class is for those who prefer relying on accuracy and hanging back a bit to provide long range support. And the medics have both offensive and healing capabilities. To heal their comrades medics must charge up their "medicators" by killing enemies. Medics are absolutely essential to getting through the game.

What were the design or technical considerations driving the 60-player online multiplayer cap?
TP: I think Eric Ellis (our multiplayer lead) said "Hey, we can do 60 players. Let's go for it!" But when he said it, he and the multiplayer team knew that technically it wouldn't be an issue. We've had 60 players running smoothly for a while now. The challenge is ensuring that 60 player battles don't dissolve into complete chaos. That's where our squad system really kicks in.

Now with *Resistance* and *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction* under your belt, what are some of the core technology lessons you've learned?
TP: We refined our techniques for asset creation. This includes having an awesome new set of tools developed internally at Insomniac. One of the great things we can do now that we couldn't before is to use the PS3 for real-time updates of our levels as we're building them. We can add a tree, building, etc. in our PC editor and see it update immediately on the PS3 without any time-consuming builds. This way we're seeing what our assets look like in the game engine right away. It's an incredibly efficient way to work and has saved us countless weeks over *Resistance: FoM.*

Rob Smith


At times you'll be fighting alongside several other soldiers called Sentinels. These soldiers have special abilities like Hale and are an important part of the story. You don't control them but they have their own very sophisticated AI routines that bring them to life.

“THE PERFECT SHOOTER”

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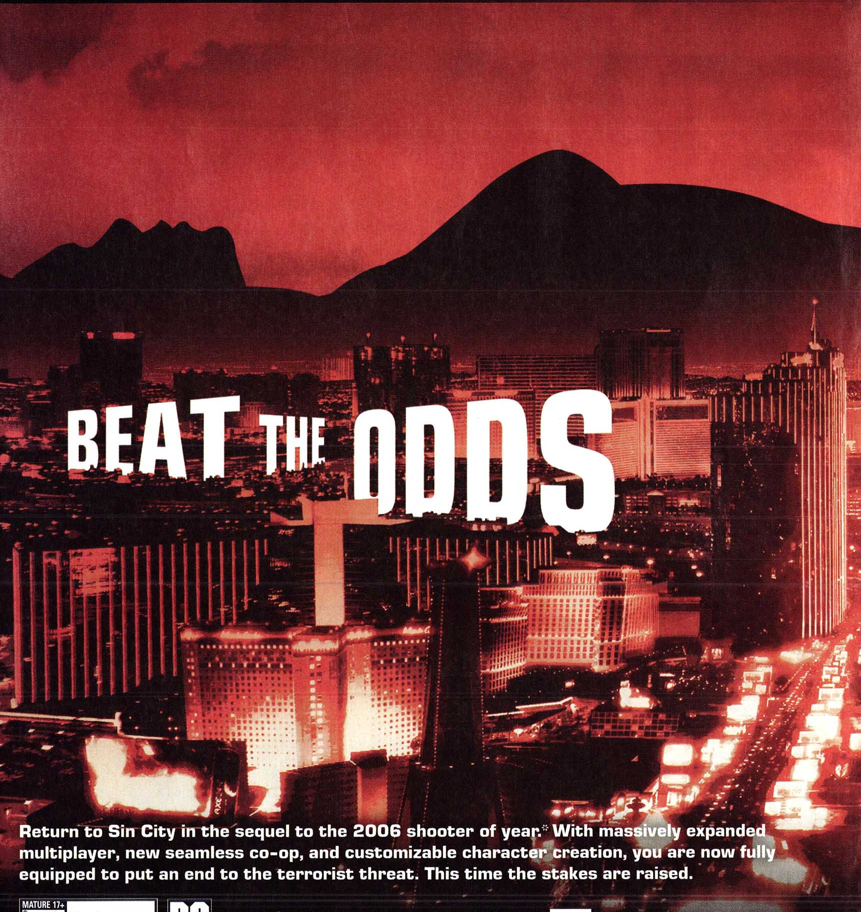

Return to Sin City in the sequel to the 2006 shooter of year.* With massively expanded multiplayer, new seamless co-op, and customizable character creation, you are now fully equipped to put an end to the terrorist threat. This time the stakes are raised.

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Strong Language

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* Best First-Person Shooter, IGN.com, 2006

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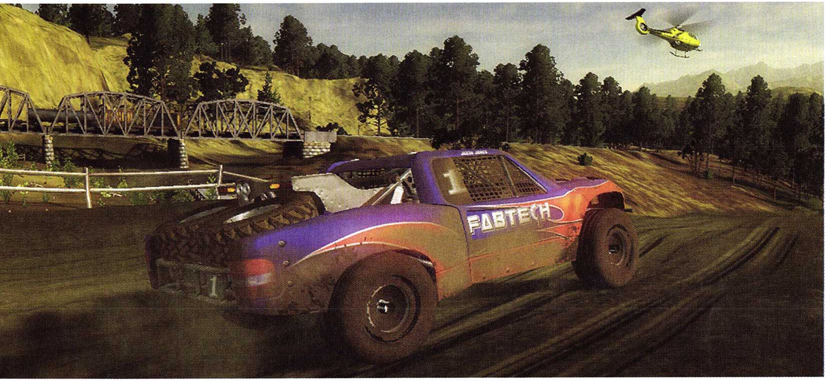


In a real trophy truck, you have to learn to breathe with the bumps in the road!

Call the chopper down when you need repairs.

Project Baja

First Look Preview

Strap yourself in or this offroad racer could just bowl you over

PS3 AVAILABLE: August 2008 GENRE: Racing PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: 2XL Games

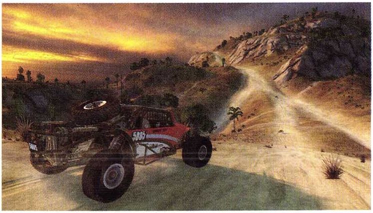
Don't you dare call *Project Baja* an arcade-style off-road racer. The folks at 2XL Games are veering off the beaten arcade path and heading in a new direction: a simulation driving game based on the Baja 1000. Even though many of the developers at 2XL have worked on arcade-based titles like *Motocross Madness, ATV Offroad Fury,* and *MX Unleashed* in the past, their hope is for their latest baby to grow into "the *Gran Turismo* of off-road racing," a thoroughly immersive simulation experience. Big shoes to fill. Here's our exclusive first look at what the game has to offer.

While *Project Baja* will feature nine different classes of trucks (with at least 168 licensed off-road vehicles), the star of the game will be the trophy truck, a behemoth-sized vehicle that usually sports around 800 horsepower and can leap over a twenty-foot long ditch as easily as a Nissan GT-R breezes past a two-inch crack on the highway. To access that baby, though, you'll have to work your way up from a modded Volkswagen. What makes trophy trucks so mobile are their long suspensions. If you look carefully at the dirt paths in these screens, you can see multiple bumps and dips. At 120 miles per hour, every imperfection in the road can potentially toss you off the track—learning to navigate a trophy truck effectively will be essential if you want to win races. But mastering these vehicles—not to mention the road—will be a challenge.

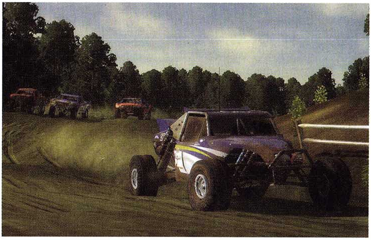
What you won't see in Project Baja are any ATVs or dirt bikes. According to 2XL Games Chief Designer Robb Rinard, that would've introduced too many complicated scenarios into the game design.

It's not just the vehicle choices that make *Project Baja* so un-

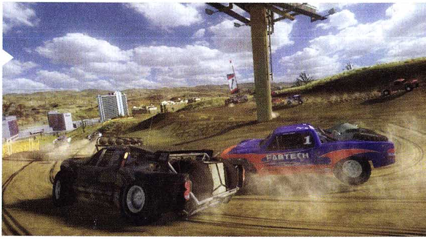
There are nine gorgeous locales.



Man versus nature. Your trophy truck versus the rugged road.



Etiquette on the (off-)road is important. If you're rude...



...then others will be rude to you. Drivers remember how you treat them.

usual... Think you know all there is to know about racetracks? Think again, because *Project Baja* is ready to revolutionize the genre. A typical racing game has you looping around short tracks that are a few miles long. If you veer off the track even a few yards, you'll most likely be forcibly placed back onto the course. Each of *Project Baja*'s 95 tracks, on the other hand, are contained within one of nine worlds, with each of those worlds equivalent to a whopping 27 square miles. If you're so inclined, you could drive toward a lake or mountain in the distance, discovering random paths and landmarks along the way.

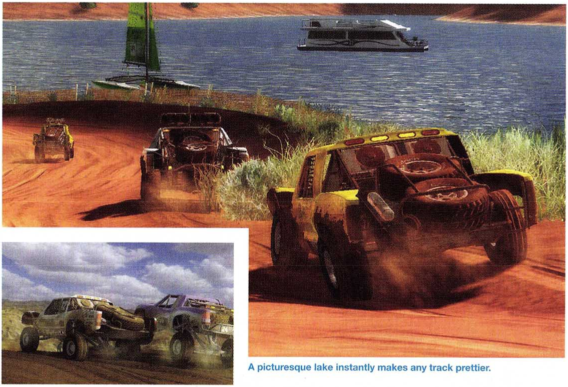
The most impressive feature of *Project Baja*'s racetrack system is the Baja 1000 simulation mode. Just like the real event, the Baja 1000 simulation has you driving over 1000 miles of unrepeated terrain. Broken up into nine segments, you will literally be racing for 20 to 25 minutes at a time from the starting point to an ending point hundreds of virtual miles away. (Don't worry, you can stop and save if you get tired. In multiplayer, you can even have an AI driver take over the wheel for a few minutes while you handle phone calls and potty breaks.) The Baja 1000 simulation mode, of course, is only one among many play modes including the de rigueur circuit and rally races, but it's the one that really distinguishes *Project Baja* and makes it stand out from the racing pack.

Regardless of the mode, racing over long stretches of bumpy roads will take a toll on your vehicle, which is why support helicopters patrol the course overhead. When you need repairs, you'll be able to page a copter via GPS. It'll land somewhere along the road, allowing you to stop for a quick fixer-upper.

When it comes to the career aspect of the game, *Project Baja* will give you a couple of ways to earn cash. Sure, you can aim for first place and pocket some purse winning, but your vehicle will also sport advertisements from sponsors. Here's where you'll need to show your driving finesse. If you drive too roughly, parts of your car might fall off, including the parts that feature your sponsors' logos, which means you won't get paid. Successfully weave the thin line between speed, endurance, and delicacy, however, and you could place in a race *and* leech money off your sponsors.

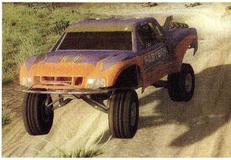
A racing game isn't much without multiplayer. That's why 2XL Games is including support for up to 12 players. They're working out a deal to make it simple for players to track their stats online and form races with others. To ensure the fun factor, multiplayer games will be totally customizable, allowing you to, say, turn clipping for trees on or off or choose whether there's a penalty for driving off course. Imagine racing your friends across 1000 miles of high-def terrain.

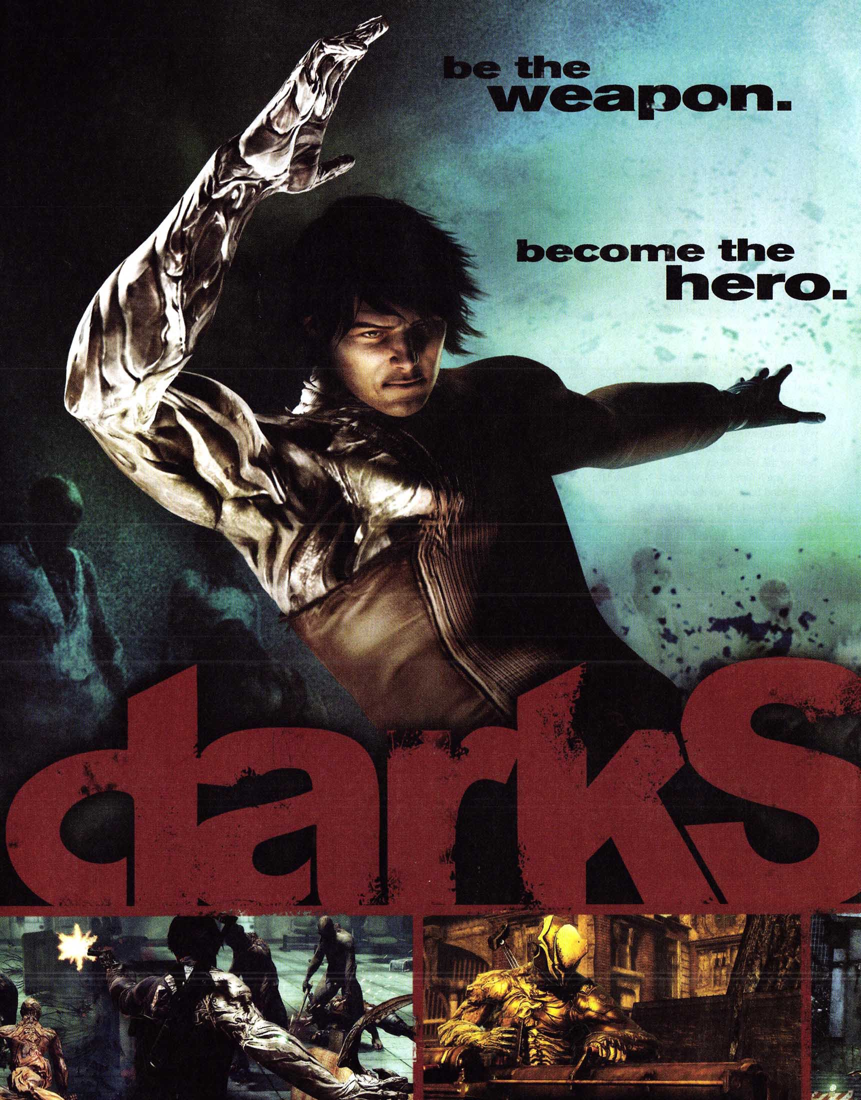
Will *Project Baja* realize its hope of being the off-road simulation dream you didn't know you were longing for? Keep your engines revved until August, and we'll let you know. Teresa Dun



A picturesque lake instantly makes any track prettier.

Check out this puppy's suspension!

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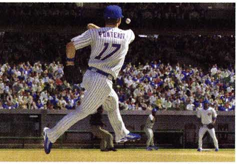
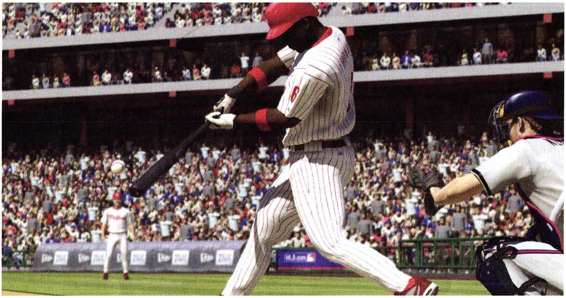


Situational realism is improved in MLB 08—there'll be no more second to third base thievery on routine infield grounders.



Ryan Howard's animations should be perfect.

MLB 08: The Show

Hands On Preview

Spring and the smell of pine tar is in the air

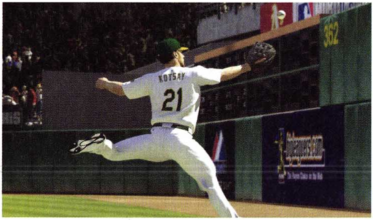
PS3/ PS2/ PSP AVAILABLE: March 2008 GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEA San Diego

PS3 | P
PS2 | P
PSP | P

We made no bones about the fact that last year's solid *MLB 07: The Show* dominated our PS3 play time probably beyond the fandom it realistically deserved. But such was our appreciation of the core pitcher/batter interface—how the game *felt* like baseball—that we overlooked some slow animations and not-quite-next-gen visuals. As with so many annually released games, this second go around on PS3 fields significant upgrades and improvements, and our playtest suggests a title-contending effort for 2008.

A few subtle interface tweaks are evident for the core gameplay mechanics and do improve the experience. As per *MLB 07* you can still guess a pitch type and location, but rather than getting a specific targeted indicator of where that pitch will go if you guess right, the information is more subtle. The outer strike zone box still flashes red if you guess the right pitch type, but if you also get the location, it's indicated in a less specific red flash in a general zone. That means that even with a well-guessed selection, the batter still has to watch the ball to determine if it's in or out of the strike zone, and time and locate his swing accordingly.

In the outfield, senior producer in charge of gameplay, **Chris Cutliff**, explained that some 500 animations had been added over last year. In addition to a surprising array of idle animations (we left the controller for a few minutes and saw the centerfielder lie down for a nap, and the first base coach, first baseman, and a base runner get together for some informal chit-chat), throw animations have been significantly enhanced. "We've got a throw animation in all eight directions for every catch situation," says **Cutliff**. The effect is an impressively more fluid and realistic reaction to fly balls in the outfield. The biggest improvement according to **Cutliff**, however, is in the situational awareness of players around the field, and not just on the diamond. Last year, it was possible to send a runner from second base to third on a ground ball to the shortstop. Now, the runner is checked back for a more situationally realistic response to that ground ball. Outfielders also make better decisions on the bases they throw to, and base runners are smarter in tag up situations. The result, we discovered, is an ever



Considering that Kotsay's already been traded by the A's, it's a good thing regular roster updates will be available for download, as they were last year.

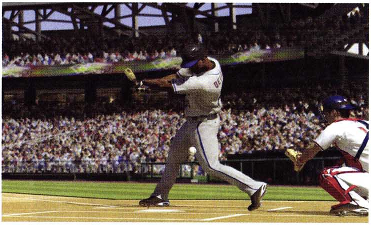
more realistic game, devoid of those "Why did they do that?!?" moments.

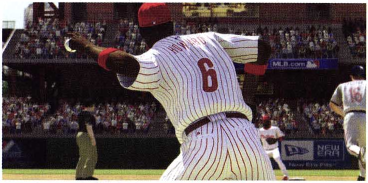
The realism factor is even extended to the crowds who bat around beach balls and lean into the field of play to snag foul balls. (Was that Steve Bartman we saw at Wrigley Field?). The latest stadium improvements for the season are also included, and roster updates will appear regularly for download through PlayStation Network, as per last year.

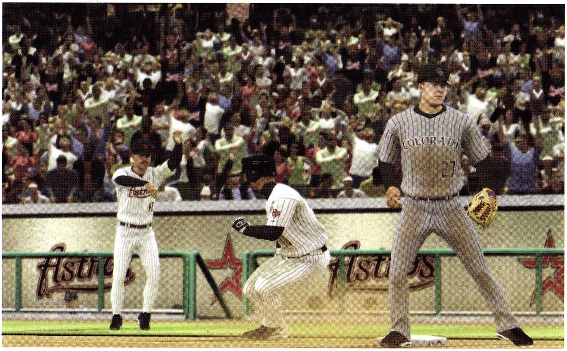
We also took the Road to the Show mode for a spin. The core mechanics of deciding your look, style, position, and key stats remain intact while tweaks under the hood have been designed to make the mode a little more forgiving, so that the potential for progression through the ranks of the minors to the majors flows more effectively. Seriously, who would have thought pitching for the Connecticut Defenders in AA ball would be so gripping? Well, it is when you're trying to achieve set situational goals (induce a ground ball, strike a guy out, etc.) and this year you're rewarded more appropriately for accomplishing those tasks.

A number of interface elements—such as the throwing meter beneath each fielder changing color as you power up to hurl a bullet (with a heightened chance of wailing one into the seats)—are still being tweaked as the game approaches its final release. But we're already pretty happy with all the improvements evident in the late build version we experienced. It's a fair bet that we'll be embroiled in the online league setup from day one of the game's March release.

Rob Smith


The batter/pitcher mechanics, a success in *MLB 07,* will be further fine-tuned.


Right on message, Howard wouldn't talk about his own home run aspirations for the season, focusing instead on his team being successful.


Stealing a home run is now a possibility. A fly ball to the wall will now have an indicator giving the fielder a location to get to, and a narrowing circle indicates the perfect time to leap.

Cover Star

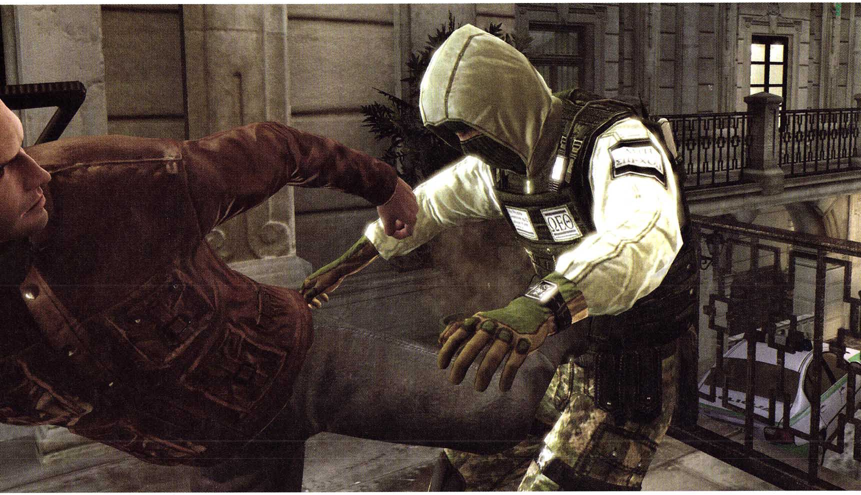
The agent for the Philadelphia Phillies slugger Ryan Howard got the call asking if the 2005 NL Rookie of the Year would be interested in being the cover athlete for *MLB 08: The Show.* It was a no-brainer, and involved spending half a day at SCEA's San Diego studio motion capture facility sporting a tight-fitting (he wasn't in spring training yet!) red suit dotted with the reflective balls that capture every move, walk-up, and swing nuance that eventually makes its way into the game.

The camera flash illuminates the white balls on the suit as Howard went through the motions of his walk-up routine, batting stance, then swinging for the fences.

Howard proved incredibly endearing while fielding question after question from the game press about what it was like to be on the cover of the game. He happily repeated how honored he was like it was the first time he was asked, and stayed perfectly on message by repeating the full name of the game at every opportunity. Howard remained relaxed and smiling as we finaly got our two minute one-on-one interview time, the last of the day. We asked if he had his in-game statistics requirements written into his contract. He denied making requests, but after a brief playtest earlier in the day, quipped that he would be taking the dev team "in the back room right here to negotiate my speed!" Though Howard admitted he would likely take a ribbing from his teammates, none of them campaigned for him to persuade the team to improve their stats.

Howard had to record swinging and missing, watching pretend balls go by, and even following a potential home run hit that would be curling foul.

For a finale, we jokingly tried to get some inside info. 'Fessing up to being a Giants fan, we asked how we should pitch to him when using Matt Cain against the Phillies. "Right down the middle," he said with a huge smile, "I don't know why I can't hit that pitch <laughing> I always seem to struggle with that!" So now you know!



Cinematic camera work and sound effects ensures that each blow feels as painful as it looks, like when you crack a guy's kneecap or slam a face into a filing cabinet.

PS3 | P

The Bourne Conspiracy

Kick, punch, it's all in the mind...

First Look Preview

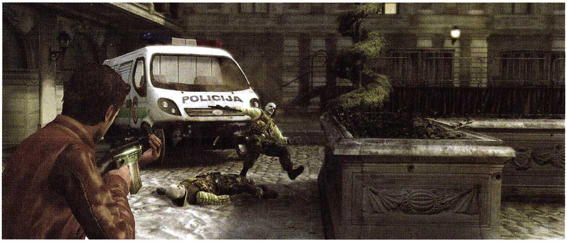
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Summer 2008 **GENRE:** Action Adventure **PUBLISHER:** Sierra **DEVELOPER:** High Moon

This terrorist bad guy was after Bourne's slick leather jacket. He won't stand for that. Allegedly.

One of the true joys of getting the inside track to early versions of games is hearing a bold, ambitious concept and then witnessing the evolution of that idea through pre-alpha to alpha to beta code to final release. It's the creative process of an idea emerging from an intriguing concept and becoming a tangible, playable experience.

We saw *The Bourne Conspiracy* almost a year ago, pitched with gusto, but still unclear on how the combat and distinctive style inspired by the movies would play out in the game. Well, having seen it in action, we can report that not only is it looking pretty sweet, it's playing with a distinctive style and panache.

It is somewhat jarring to see the Jason Bourne that most of us identify with—the one from the movies, not the books—not portrayed as, well, Matt Damon. In this third-person action adventure identifying with your character is crucial since you'll see plenty of him while slugging bad guys. Bourne's movie-styled actions play out like a tight, scripted hand-to-hand fighting game, but it's the creative use of an adrenaline meter that kicks the on-screen action into movie-like overdrive. Punching at whoever is in the way (good guys or bad guys is irrelevant... if they're in



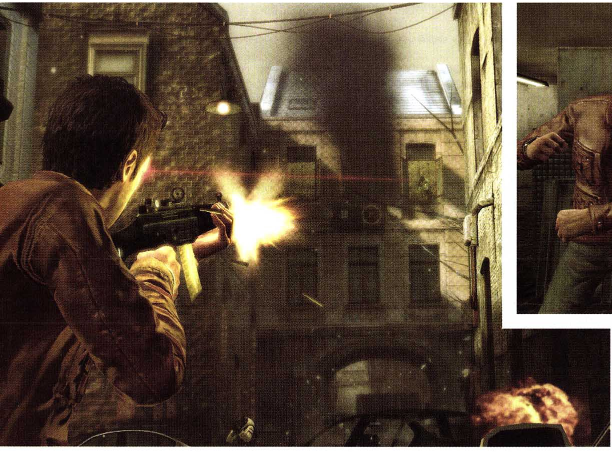
Light and heavy attacks can be used in combos that are both engaging and effective, but fortunately massive button memory isn't a requirement like in many hardcore beat-'em-ups.

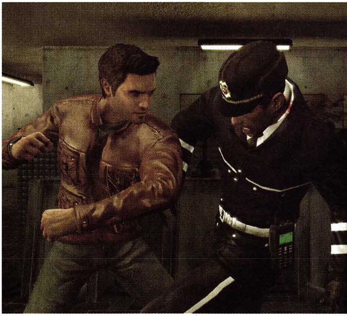
Bourne's way, they're just in the way), generates adrenaline that powers context-sensitive special attacks. Items like a fire extinguisher might seem like a static prop, and you can't rip it from the wall and wander an entire level with it in hand ("That's just not Bourne," says the game's design director, Paul O'Connor). But in the heat of battle (which you'll feel as *Bourne* supports rumble on PS3), you can execute a special attack and grab the extinguisher to administer a knockout blow to your enemy.

As we discovered in our playtest, the impact is sensational. Mid-pugilistic struggle you can slug your foe with parts of the scenery. Specifically-designed animations and moves ensure that the pay-off, while actually a canned animation, appears fluid and interactive. *God of War*-style button presses to time jumps across rooftops, for example, help the game maintain a cinematic pace while still making it seem like you're in charge. It's a tricky balance to achieve and we're anxious to find out if our initial impressions hold up in the final version.

Given the lack of a multiplayer component, the single-player action needs to be exceptional. We were pleasantly surprised with the dynamic gameplay during our hands-on time—especially the *Italian Job*-like car chase and its *Midnight Club* style of racing (since it's crafted by the same folks, no surprise there).

Is this finally a movie (and book) to game conversion that will live up to the potential of the source material? We shall see. Rob Smith





Fist fights are a huge part of the gameplay, but crouching behind cover and using guns to cap armed enemies also plays a big part. Again, adrenaline can help you take down a foe with a one-shot kill.

In addition to constantly swapping out one GD10 function for another and ordering squads, you can call up a satellite's-eye view of the battlefield, the positions and dispositions of all combat units, and even the layout of the battlefield itself, with all its potential points of cover.

Tiberium

First Look Preview

Command and Reconquer

PS3 AVAILABLE: "When It's Finished" GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA Los Angeles

PS3 | P

First-person action, squad-based mechanics, and an exhaustively-realized science-fiction setting so far up the FUBAR scale that it makes Chernobyl look like a partly-cloudy day at Epcot: Even for a planet well into its third 21st-Century global-scale conflict, the world of Electronic Arts' *Tiberium* is messed up. The powerful extraterrestrial ore Tiberium—already a glowing green hazard as far back as the original *Command & Conquer* PC game—has run a cancerous, crystalline, toxic riot over much of the Earth.

As GDI field commander Ricardo Vega, you go down in the muck at the first-person level, personally commanding men and 'mechs, alike—as well as the occasional air- and orbit-based strategic strike—to reconquer the infected Earth the hard way, one radioactive battlefield at a time.

What remains of the 'World As We Know It' is a radically-transformed global geography, divided into color-designated zones of varying danger—blue for the relatively-unaffected areas, yellow for the areas where the environmental state is still touch-and-go, and red for the areas that have been rendered so contaminated and unrecognizable as to resemble an alien world. For the occupational forces of the alien Scrin, good news… for us, not so much.

Executive Producer Chris Plummer waxes apocalyptic about the Tiberium-oriented world presented in the game: "Tiberium is radioactive, it converts anything it comes into contact with into more Tiberium—infecting the entire planet, it has become a powerful resource, the 'New Oil'. It's a great catalyst for combat, and touches on resonant themes today; the effect of exploited resources, what that does to the environment and to our culture, how it divides mankind…" then he seems to come back to himself a little, and continues: "But at the end of the

As field commander, you'll have a limited but useful jump-jet ability to gain higher ground.

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An important aspect of *Tiberium* comes in the form of its audio technology, dubbed 'Adaptive Surround eXperience' (ASX); explained by Senior Audio Director Erik Kraber, it's an ambitious, complex audio scheme that constantly evaluates all the various audible elements in your proximity, and continually emphasizes, augments or dampens them, depending on what will make the situation at hand the most absorbing and dramatic.

day, it's about the combat, about the action."

And so it is: That action takes the form of a fairly familiar first-person interface augmented by some powerful and unusual features, the first of which is the in-game arsenal itself. Most gamers would doubtless be disappointed to be restricted to any single weapon, but then, most weapons aren't the GDI-issue GD10, an all-purpose marvel of technology that physically reconfigures on the fly to assume a host of combat functions.

In addition to the expected assault rifle, the GD10 also functions as an energy cannon and a sniper rifle. In its grenade launcher configuration, it not only allows for conventional indirect-fire attacks (with the help of an onscreen indicator showing the arcing path that any lobbed explosives will follow), but also features a "roller" function whereby you can throw a grenade, have it land on the ground without exploding, and then guide and roll it remotely to detonate on targets behind cover and around corners.

Equally impressive (and entertaining) is the GD10's surface-to-air missile function which, with a sweep of the analog stick, can lock on up to four airborne targets at once and let fly with a 'drunken missile' swarm of independently-seeking warheads that carve the air with their twisting contrails.

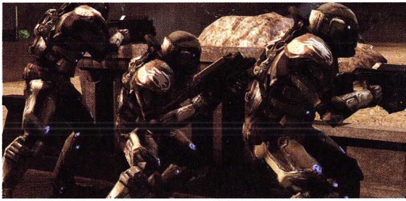
Even with an impressive, unlikely morphing gadget like the GD10, Vega wouldn't last very long without support squads and reinforcements. As you push forward, securing Tiberium spikes and drop zones, you can bring additional personnel resources under your command—standard ground troops, specially-equipped anti-air missile soldiers, badass lumbering bipedal-'mech Titans, as well as—and oh, how this brings back real-time strategy gaming memories!—Orca fighter-bomber squadrons for some close air support.

Each type of reinforcement has its own set of rock-paper-cruise missile advantages and disadvantages against other units, of course, and the challenge seems to be split between putting up a good first-person fight of your own, supporting your squads, and matching the available types of reinforcements to the demands of a changing battlefield. The gigantic Titan, for example, is not only a powerful offensive weapon in its own right, but a good, solid slab of mobile cover for friendly troops, who can move forward in, and fight from, its shadow.

Finally, it would hardly be a game descendant of the *Command & Conquer* franchise if you weren't able to occasionally call down some suitably ungodly-hideous form of devastating strategic strike from the pale blue sky. We know for sure that the orbital Ion Cannon strike (or something enough like it) will be available when certain battlefield control points are secured. As with directing reinforcement-squad attacks, it's simply a matter of pointing Vega's command-interface reticule at the thing you want to make go away, and pushing the right button.

We've thus far been told very little new information about the Scrin, or indeed about the zealous, nut-job Nod forces, who seek to spread the world-ruining alien ore as some kind of transformative Gift from Above (if Tiberium is the 'New Oil,' the deluded Nod elements would be analogous to the 'New Al-Qaeda'). We've also seen nothing of the multiplayer in action, which is a real pity—this kind of squad-based mayhem looks to be awesome, particularly with Titans, Orcas, and GDI-knows-what kind of spectacular strikes being loosed on all sides. Top military secrets are usually secret for a reason, and sometimes, as a result, all the more impressive when they're finally unleashed on the world. Chris Hudak

What we've seen so far has been visually glorious.



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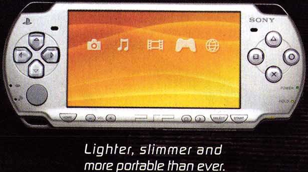

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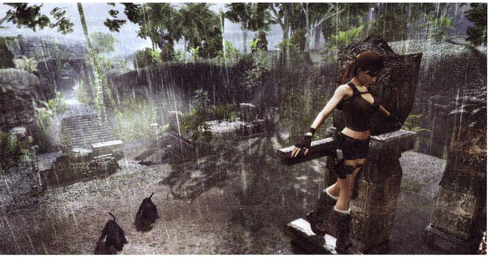
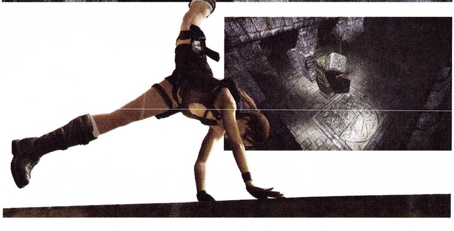
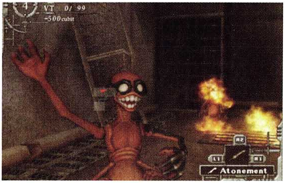




Tomb Raider: Underworld

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q4 2008 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive
DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics

We already know that next-gen systems go hand-in-hand with snazzy physics engines, drool-worthy picture quality, and graceful mo-capped animations, so we expect to be amazed by all of that in Lara Croft's next adventure, *Tomb Raider: Underworld.* But when we heard that the game would ship with beautifully detailed weather effects as well, we had only one question: what happens when Lara takes a stroll through the rain? More specifically, what happens to her shirt? We're not naughty, we just need to know for, er, research reasons. Yeah. TD



Baroque

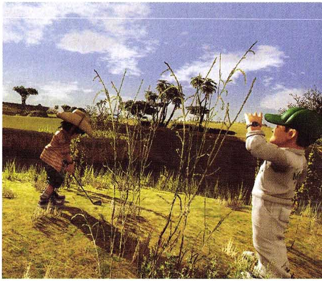
PS3 AVAILABLE: February 26, 2008
GENRE: Action RPG
PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: Sting

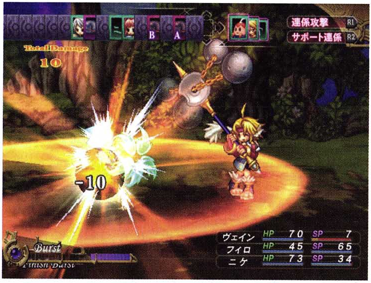
Set in a cyberpunk universe, *Baroque* is an action RPG that will have you grappling with issues like guilt, sin, and atonement from the very start. The tone is macabre: your own character's death, which would normally lead to a Game Over screen, is required to further the plot. The game's emphasis is on dungeon-crawling—the intense, dirt-in-your-fingernails type—so RPG fans who crave that sort of experience may have a lot to look forward to in February. TD

Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds

PS3 AVAILABLE: March 2008 GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: SCEA
DEVELOPER: SCE Japan/Clap Hanz

The aim of the *Hot Shots* series has always been to make sports games attractive to sports and non-sports fans alike by using cartoon-style characters and simplified mechanics. The latest *Hot Shots Golf* takes this one step further with its new, dynamic, and more intuitive "Advanced Shot" system. This control mechanism requires you to analyze your golfer's body movements, the terrain, and the weather, but in such a seamless way that even a sports sim novice won't break a sweat. Truly, a golfing game for the masses. TD





Mana Khemia:

Alchemists of Al-Revis

PS2 AVAILABLE: March 31, 2008 GENRE: RPG/School Sim PUBLISHER: NIS America, Inc. DEVELOPER: Gust Co., Ltd.

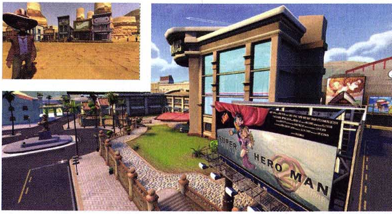
In any Japanese RPG, a lonely, amnesiac kid is bound to have an epic destiny. So it's hardly surprising when Vayne, the memory-bereft protagonist of *Mana Khemia,* is summoned to a school for alchemists-in-training and told he possesses great hidden power. By attending classes, making friends, battling monsters for alchemy ingredients (with a conditional turn-based system like in *FFX),* and interacting with his mysterious feline companion, Vayne will slowly make a life for himself. We'll tell you whether his adventure is one worth experiencing in a full review soon. TD

Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall 2008 GENRE: Adventure
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal DEVELOPER: Team 17

It's a shame that you may have never heard of, or experienced, the adventures of one polyester suit-wearing lounge lizard, Larry Laffer. As a staple of PC comedy adventures beginning way back in 1987, Larry is a certifiable deity in the gaming pantheon. His crude, colorful, comedic (but also kinda tragic) style garnered a cult status. The turn to next-gen introduces his nephew in the lead role, and a cast of voice talent encompassing hotties Carmen Electra, Nikki Cox, and Shannon Elizabeth, alongside Artie Lange, Patrick Warburton, Jay Mohr, and Josh Keaton (who voices a Larry designed for the slightly younger demographic).

This offbeat adventure is likely to be less *American Pie,* and more late night network TV in its baudiness, but the cartoon style and off-the-wall comedy will hopefully do justice to the storied legacy of this franchise. Hopefully. RS



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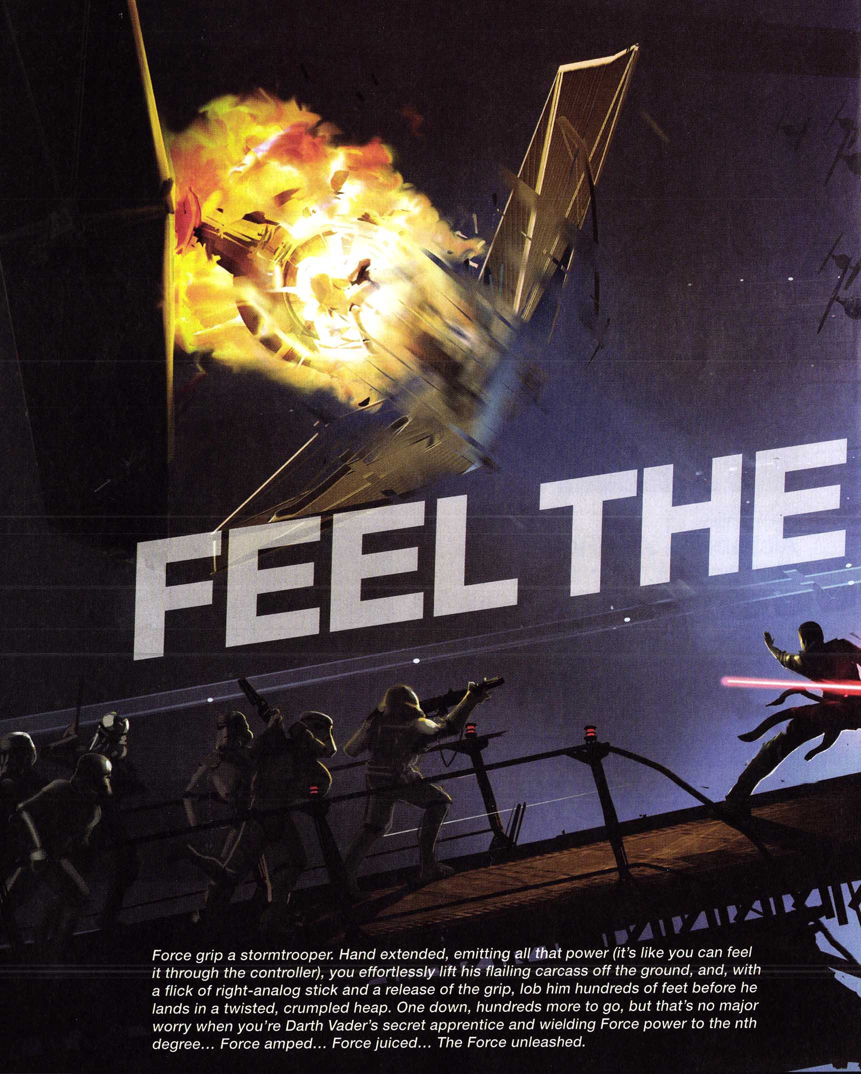


FEEL THE

Force grip a stormtrooper. Hand extended, emitting all that power (it's like you can feel it through the controller), you effortlessly lift his flailing carcass off the ground, and, with a flick of right-analog stick and a release of the grip, lob him hundreds of feet before he lands in a twisted, crumpled heap. One down, hundreds more to go, but that's no major worry when you're Darth Vader's secret apprentice and wielding Force power to the nth degree... Force amped... Force juiced... The Force unleashed.

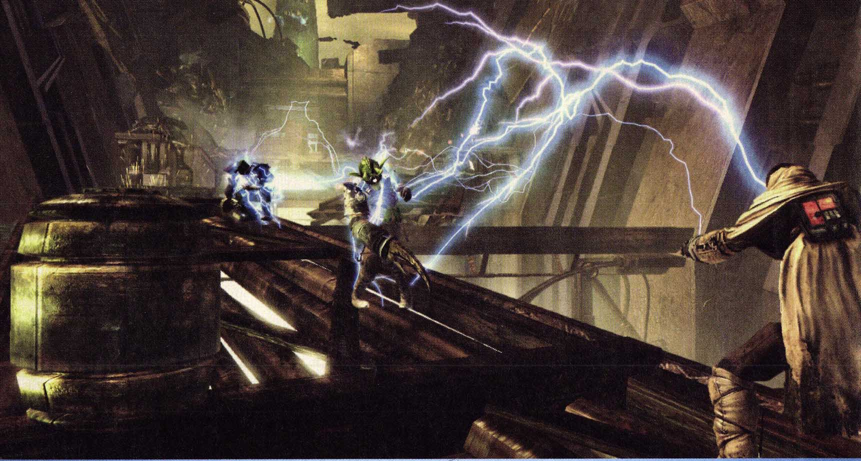
FORCE

Strap yourself in for canon-shaking revelations as the gloves come off and LucasArts prepares **Star Wars: The Force Unleashed.**

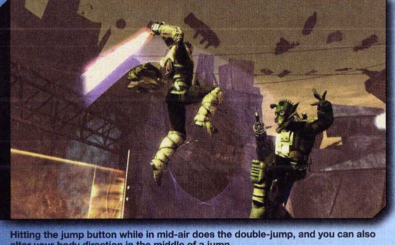
By Rob Smith

Platform:
PS3, PS2, PSP

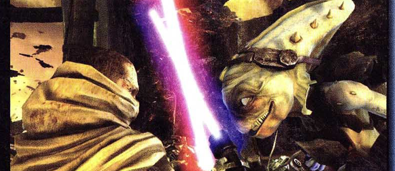
AVAILABLE: July 2008
GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DEVELOPER: LucasArts



Three physics engines—euphoria, Havok, and DMM (digital molecular management) are integrated together to power the game world, character movement and interactions, and objects.



Hitting the jump button while in mid-air does the double-jump, and you can also alter your body direction in the middle of a jump.



When using the lightsaber if you button mash quickly you'll do quick strikes, but if you're more deliberate you'll do more damage in the area of effect.

In between the timelines of Episodes 3 and 4 of the *Star Wars* movies lay the fertile territory of imperial ascendance and the disquiet of rebellion. A galactic empire is burgeoning; political machinations rage in the underbelly of power as senate seats are contested and plots are devised for personal gain. Within that setting the dark Sith Lord Darth Vader is plotting—it is his desire to seek out and destroy every remaining Jedi. Vader discovers that a potential target went into hiding on the jungle planet of Kashyyyk prior to the Clone Wars. The backstory has Vader tracking down the Jedi and killing him. Vader then discovers a small boy—the son of the Jedi—and quickly discovers that the child has inherited impressive powers. It turns out that the wife of Vader's prey was also a Jedi (though she was killed some time in the past, protecting Wookiees from slavers while her son was still an infant). "We know the children of Jedi are incredibly powerful," explains the game's executive producer, Haden Blackman, "so it follows that a child of two Jedi is even more powerful."

Fast forward about fifteen years and the Sith Lord has taken the boy under his wing, training the Force-imbued tyke as his secret apprentice. The Force is undoubtedly strong in this one, and Vader begins to ruminate on the potential of this powerful boy's destiny. Known only as the "Apprentice," this voyage of discovery will propel you through a Star Wars story as gripping as the movies.

As has leaked out elsewhere in recent months, *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* contains plot twists that aren't merely "OMG" moments within the game itself, but shake the very foundations of the revered canon. I know, but I'm not telling. It's so damn cool that to reveal it would be a huge spoiler. And even knowing, after spending time hands-on with an early build of the game, I can still barely wait to experience how the events unfold in this bold interactive backstory reveal. Between

We're not trying to hide it away, but we learned that the next-gen version of *TFU* will not have a multiplayer component. None. Nada.

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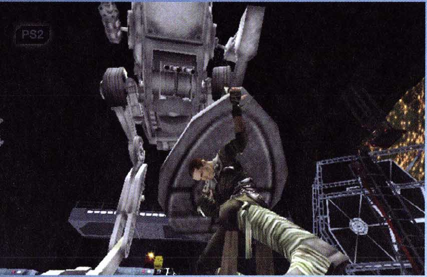
> *IT'S CLEAR THAT EVERY POWERFUL EFFECT IS PRETTY MUCH RIGHT THERE AT YOUR FINGERTIPS. QUESTION IS, HOW DO YOU USE THESE POWERS?*



Your Force meter is drained by using your powers (the more powerful the power, the more it's depleted), but with even a sliver of energy, you can use any power, even the most powerful, for a final desperation shot.

Ask ILM

LucasArts tapped sibling visual effects company ILM for the technology to create detailed facial likenesses for *TFU's* cinematics. The Apprentice is played by Sam Witwer (recently in *The Mist,* and also Crashdown on *Battlestar Galactica)* who lends both his voice and likeness to the role. One of the first Jedi you chase down, General Kota, was voiced by Cully Fredericksen, who's had a variety of TV roles and played a Vulcan in *Star Trek* episodes. The actors had their faces mapped using the full 360-degree technology crafted by ILM, and the result is remarkably accurate in-game likenesses.

investments in cutting-edge new technology, allowing extra time for the game to mature and deliver on its promise, and incorporating defining story arcs that will have non-gamers wondering what happened (and theoretically wanting to play the game to find out for themselves), LucasArts is on the verge of unleashing the most memorable *Star Wars* game in its history.

THE APPRENTICE: YOU'RE HIRED

As you take control of this intriguing Apprentice character, Vader directs you to a TIE fighter factory to take out a Jedi called General Kota. One instruction resonates: leave no witnesses. As rebel forces launch their own attack on the factory and its stormtrooper guards, a bold, wild, dynamic, entirely unscripted shootout transpires, with you eminently capable of fulfilling the vow to leave no one alive.

You initially drop into a straightforward hallway populated by droids that are essentially target practice. But inside the hangar, you wield the first of the Force powers at your disposal. And these are Force powers unlike anything you've ever seen before. Force Jump sits on the X button, Force Push on the Circle, and your lightsaber on the Square. Force grip lets you grab targeted objects with the R2 trigger, and it's immediately clear that every powerful effect is right at your fingertips. The question is, how do you use these powers, and can you figure out the combos that will take your skills to an even higher level?

In this wide open environment you start to feel the power of this uber-Force. Blackman told us that this mission was currently being tweaked, and that it would see TIE fighters and TIE bombers rotated into the area. Why is this important? Because even with your relatively fledgling powers, you can still Force grip a TIE fighter from the rack and sling it across the hangar. Huge chunks of metal hitting stormtroopers? It's like bowling with a metal ball that measures over ten feet wide.

Retail Unleashed

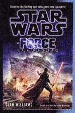
Beyond the videogame you'll be able to drown yourself in *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* merchandise:

GRAPHIC NOVEL

STAR WARS
FORCE UNLEASHED

The first two-thirds of the graphic novel tell the story from Proxy's point-of-view, and the last third from inside the mind of Juno. Written by the story creator, Blackman, and published by Dark Horse, we've got an exclusive eight-page tease to whet your appetite starting on page 59.

NOVEL



Written by Sean Williams, the novel of the game will fill out the story with extra scenes that Blackman wrote for the game, but which were cut for pacing and the scope of the game.

LEGO

LEGO
STAR WARS
8-12

The Rogue Shadow ship, piloted by Juno to ferry the Apprentice around the galaxy is sleek, black, and LEGO! It even includes a battle-damaged Vader, which begs the question: how did he get damaged?

STAR WARS MINIATURES

STAR WARS
FORCE

A Force Unleashed Booster pack for the HeroClix tabletop miniatures game was released last November and includes 60 figures, including 15 game characters.

A "pay-off" camera view will follow a flying body or other cool incident if you pull off a spectacular move.

Swing for the fences! Connect with a powerful lightsaber combo and you'll slug a target into next week.

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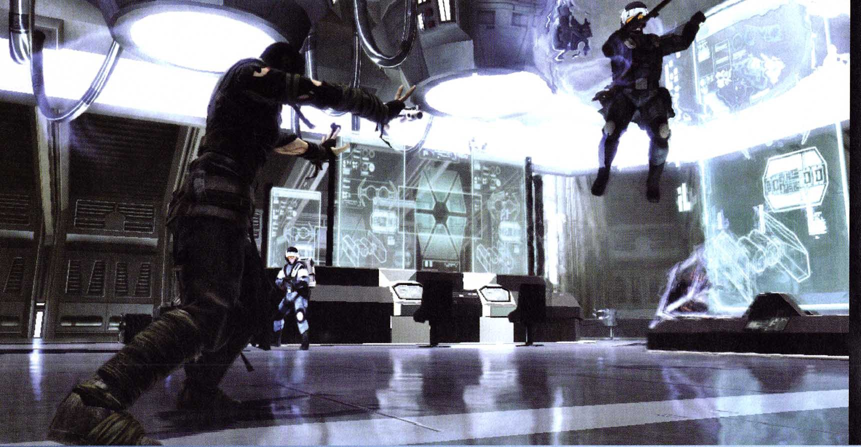


First chance you get, use the L1 button to dash, then do a dash followed by Force push on a guy and just see how far he flies!

PlayStation 2

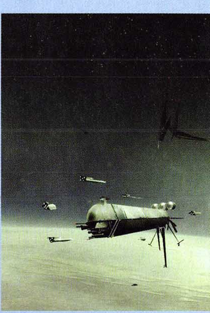
Developed by Australia-based Krome Studios, the PS2 version of *TFU* is built from the ground up to emulate the next-gen experience, but also adds its own unique style and flavor. We went hands-on with it and were pretty amazed at the graphics quality that demonstrates how far the PS2 is being pushed. Though the scale may be smaller than the big next-gen brother, the ambition certainly isn't. The PS2 game will feature five unique missions in three different places from those traversed in the PS3 game. The part we played took place inside the Jedi temple where after dispatching stormtroopers with the same vigor and range of attacks we'd seen on PS3, we fought Darth Desolous, a Jedi created by Krome specifically for this game.

In addition, a Cloud City level transpires in a different way, but the wielding of an unleashed Force felt nearly as powerful as on the PS3. (In one "boss" battle we destroyed TIE fighters by Force gripping and flinging them into a tractor beam.) Some original game mechanics also help ensure that the PS2 version displays its own standalone credentials, and could even deliver enough unique content to make its purchase alongside the PS3 version a viable consideration for (the hardest of hardcore) Star Wars fans.

These are the powers of the Force unleashed. Blackman revealed that in development meetings with George Lucas the filmmaker made some surprising admissions. "The Jedi heritage is important," says Blackman, "but some of the named characters aren't necessarily the most powerful Jedi who have ever lived… so that was kind of a revelation for us." Another vital direction jab from Lucas was to push the designers to create new characters for the universe, rather than rely on those whose stories are so well known through the movies. That resulted in the team making up the mother and father characters, and also two more that will play a crucial role throughout the game: Juno Eclipse, your sassy pilot who may also fulfill the movie-requisite love interest role, and Proxy, a comedic robot sidekick.

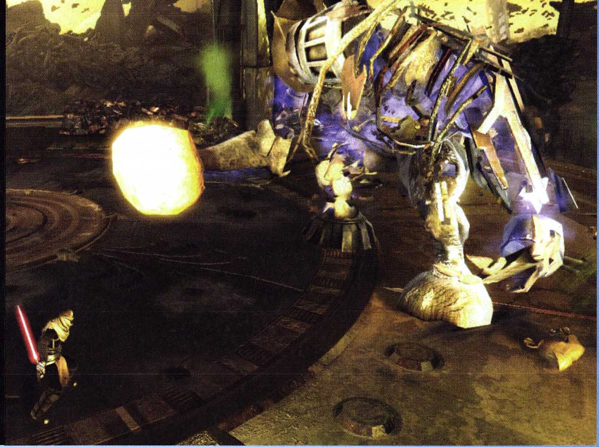
FORCE COMBO

Even at the start of the game, your Force powers are well developed. After completing missions you'll be awarded points you can use to boost existing powers or unlock new combos and skills. No new fiction has been created to explain these point upgrades. "We didn't want to use midi-chlorians or anything like that," says Blackman, "so you just earn Force points." In addition, Force talents are a separate upgrade option that allow you to strengthen attributes like your health or energy bar, your chance of deflecting shots back at a shooter, or the amount of damage



Blocking laser fire with the lightsaber is an automatic defense, but if you press and hold L2 the probability of blocking and reflecting that shot back at the enemy increases.

Blackman, aside from writing various *Star Wars* books and games, has also written books on haunted houses.



Exploration is encouraged and rewarded by finding holocrons. Sith holocrons grant power-ups (the exact type and format still to be determined), and Jedi holocrons are treasure chests, unlocking new costumes, lightsaber hilts, and lightsaber crystals.

PSP

Not to be outdone, the PSP version will deliver a slew of original game modes and features not available in either big brother versions. The core game, which follows the same Apprentice storyline, looks impressive and utlizes nifty camera work to overcome the lack of a second analog stick for view perspective control. But the big differentiator is this skew's four player peer-to-peer multiplayer. with three available game modes: Force Frenzy (Deathmatch), World of Galaxy (King of the Hill), and Force Out, described by the game's producer, David Knott, as "kicking someone's ass with the Force."

If that's not enough, this PSP product will also feature "historical" battles. Vader approaches Luke for their famous smackdown on Cloud City. As the camera swoops in you expect to inhabit the body of farmer boy to face off against the Sith Lord, but suddenly you find yourself in Vader's shoes. It's a neat, sweet turn that let's you unleash the Dark side in the Carbomite Chamber. Other historical battles include the Anakin vs. Obi-Wan duel from Episode 3, the Geonosis Coliseum fight from Episode 2, the battle at the Saarlak Dune from Episode 6, and Mace's showdown with Jango. Seriously, the sheer volume of cool ideas culled from the entire Star Wars canon spanning all three PlayStation products is pretty staggering. All the versions will be available in July.

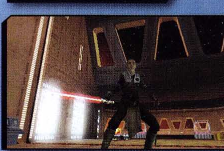
your lightsaber inflicts. The total package of points and talents, and the option to specialize the powers—upgrading lightning to chain lightning or repulse to chain repulse (that will actually vaporize weaker enemies)—encourages personalized play styles. The advanced powers like lightsaber throw, repulse, and lightning shield are all executed using the block button and one of the face buttons as a shift modifier.

It's going to be fun just to see how crazy you can get with the powers. Within minutes of starting our playtest we'd gripped fools and pushed them out of sight, thrown the lightsaber to impale them, and executed the "Barry Bonds" (or as it was described: "saber, saber, push") which launches the target for a home run! The early levels are designed as "grip playgrounds" to test your skills, but become more challenging as enemies start to target explosive barrels if they see you've gripped one and intend to launch it in their direction.

This awareness extends to how the enemies react to each other and the environment. If you Force grip a stormtrooper and swing him around he'll try to grab a secure object, which could be a railing or it could be another stormtrooper. Since these effects are dynamically powered by the euphoria engine physics there's no predicting what will happen. For example, during our playtest, we surprised a stormtrooper squad and quickly Force gripped one of them. Two other stormtroopers stopped to observe their squadmate, seemingly curious about what had occurred… and that was enough time to fling the first guy and throw the lightsaber to take down two more. Fun with physics and stormtroopers: I doubt it will get old.

PLOT POINTS

After defeating General Kota and returning to Vader, you're sent to take down Kasdan Paratus, a bizarre Jedi living on the junk world of Raxus Prime (which was created for the *Clone Wars* game). On this world you'll do some platforming, and fight enemies that can drain your Force power. In the boss battle, Paratus summons golems susceptible to your newfound Force lightning power. The visual look is distinctly different, the tactics required to succeed totally original, and experimenting with combos (which you can do pre-mission in the training room) illustrates how you can take significantly varied approaches to many situations.



A mini-map on the HUD will highlight enemies you know about and also have icons directing you to the next objective. It includes a snapshot of the map taken directly from Zed, the game's level editor.

Beyond this, we can only imagine. Given that you're Force gripping full-size TIE fighters early in the game, and concept art has hinted at pulling down enormous star destroyers with your powers, expect to be boggled by this massively unleashed Force. The Apprentice's story appears truly fascinating as he works as Vader's pawn, witnesses the birth of the rebellion, and discovers his own destiny in the galaxy. If you think some of the videos have looked cool, experiencing those Force powers at your fingertips is something else. The dynamic nature of the underlying technology drives a unique experience with each play through that should satisfy hardcore and casual gamers alike. But at the end of the day, you'll just have to know the shocking plot twist(s), right? △○✕□

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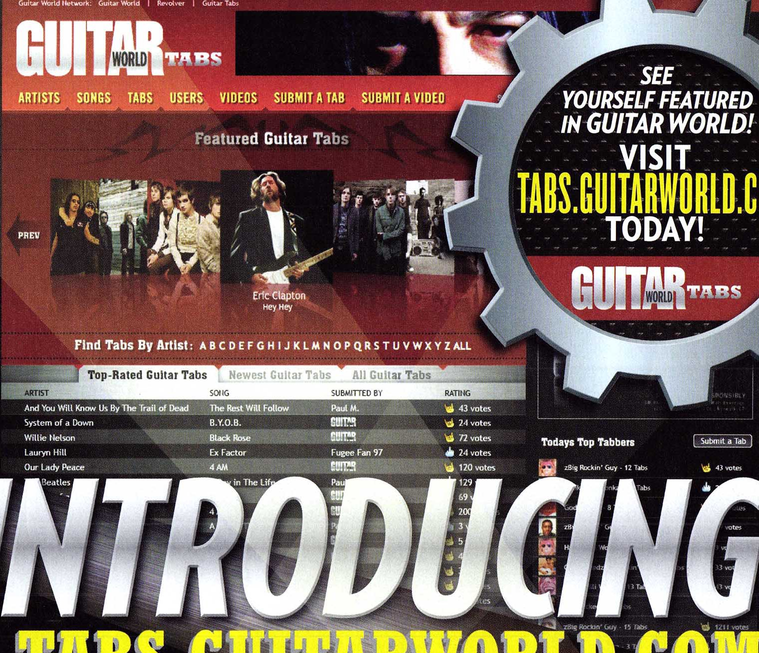
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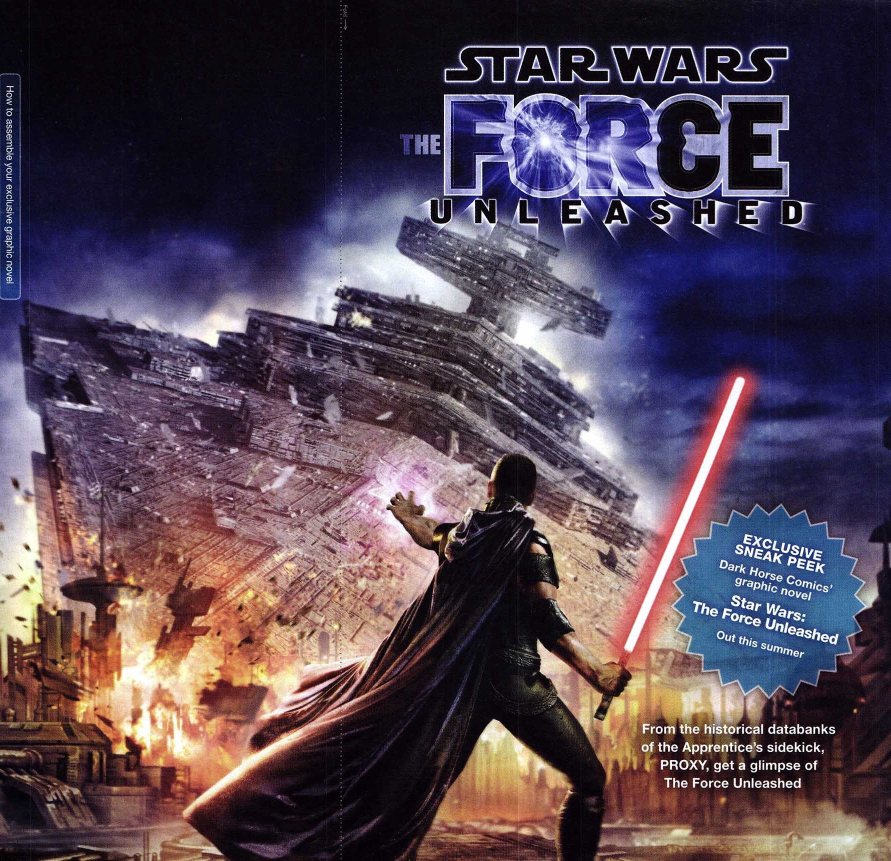
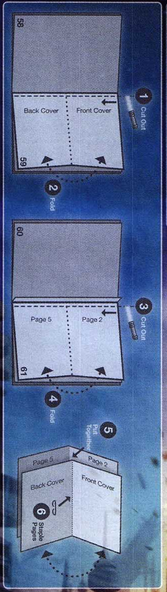
STAR WARS THE FORCE UNLEASHED



EXCLUSIVE SNEAK PEEK
Dark Horse Comics' graphic novel
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
Out this summer

From the historical databanks of the Apprentice's sidekick, PROXY, get a glimpse of The Force Unleashed

How to assemble your exclusive graphic novel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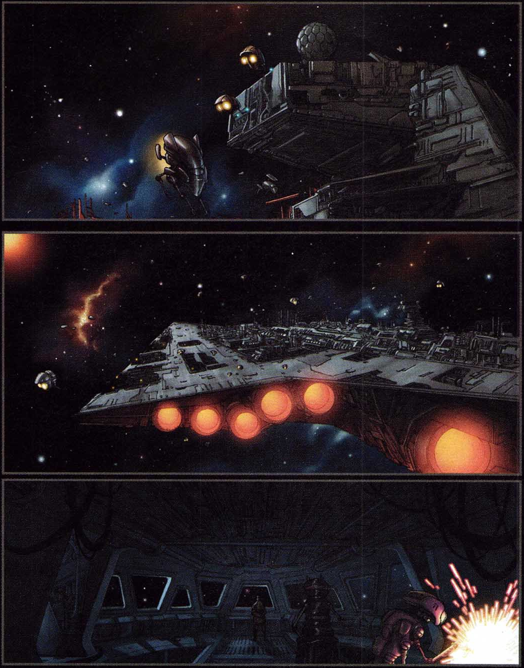
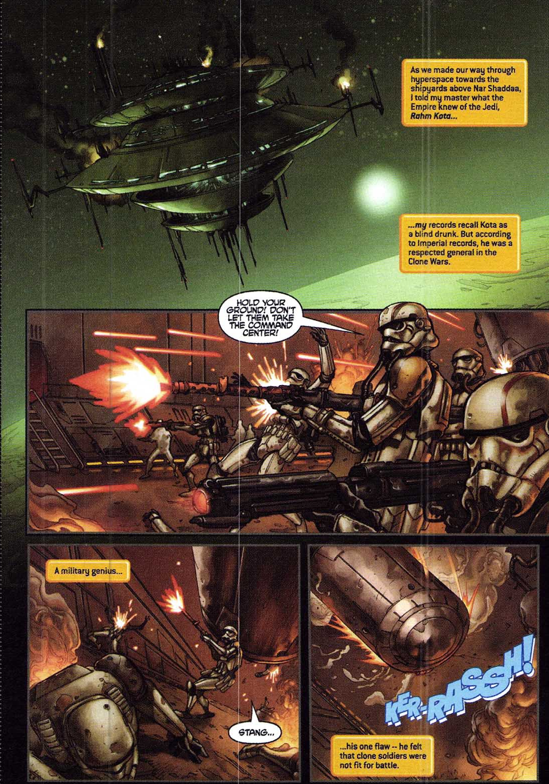
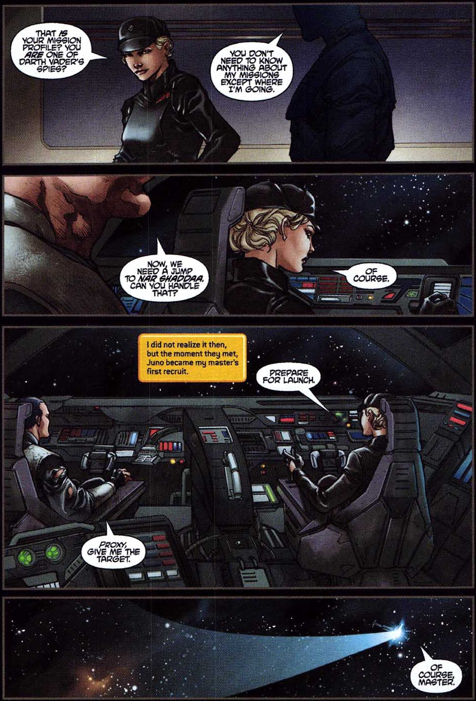
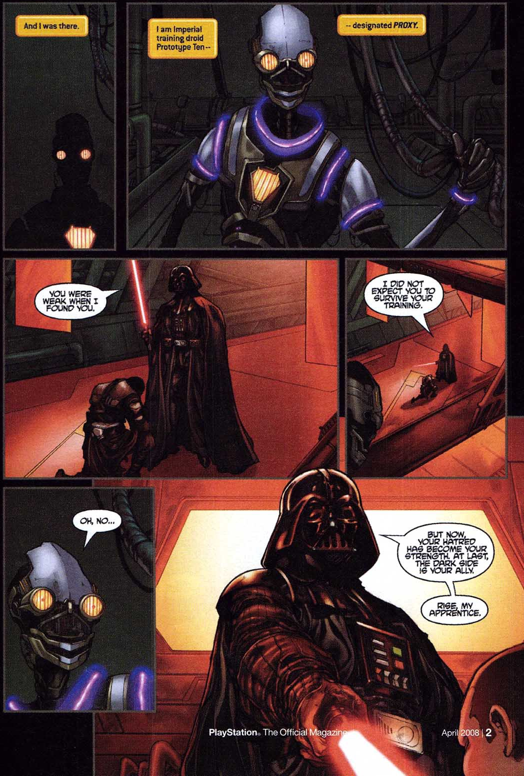
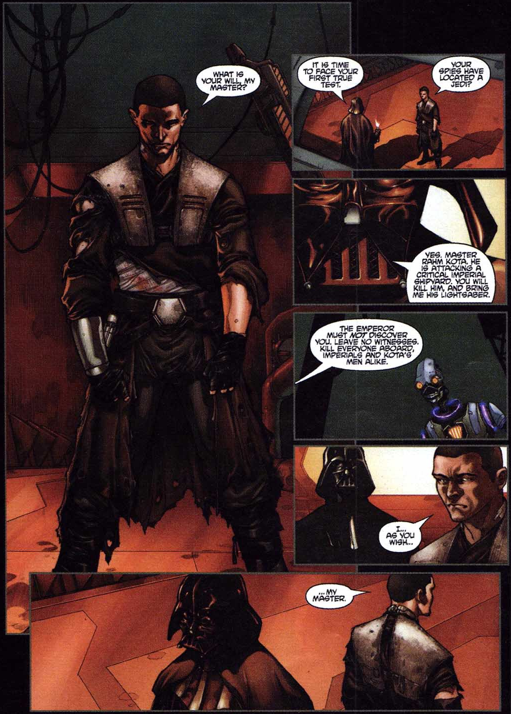
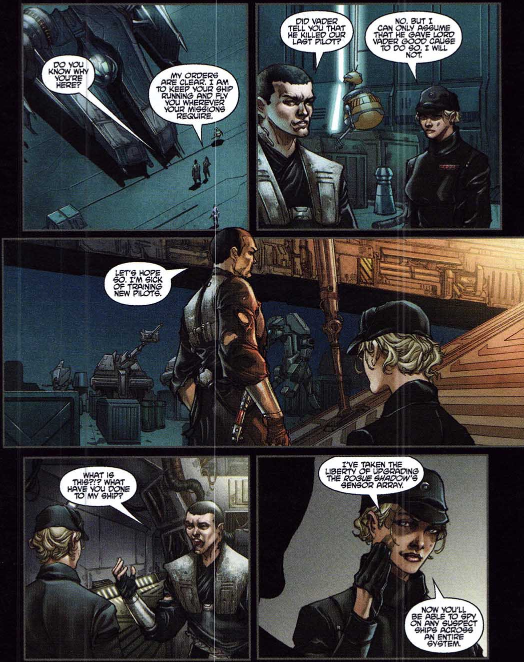



As we made our way through hyperspace towards the shipyards above Nar Shaddaa, I told my master what the Empire knew of the Jedi, *Rahm Kota*...
...my records recall Kota as a blind drunk. But according to Imperial records, he was a respected general in the Clone Wars.
HOLD YOUR GROUND! DON'T LET THEM TAKE THE COMMAND CENTER!
A military genius...
STANG...
KER-RASSH!
...his one flaw -- he felt that clone soldiers were not fit for battle.


THAT *IS* YOUR MISSION PROFILE? YOU *ARE* ONE OF DARTH VADER'S SPIES?
YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT MY MISSIONS EXCEPT WHERE I'M GOING.
NOW, WE NEED A JUMP TO *NAR SHADDAA*. CAN YOU HANDLE THAT?
OF COURSE.
I did not realize it then, but the moment they met, Juno became my master's first recruit.
PREPARE FOR LAUNCH.
PROXY, GIVE ME THE TARGET.
OF COURSE, MASTER.


And I was there.
I am Imperial training droid Prototype Ten--
-- designated *PROXY.*
YOU WERE WEAK WHEN I FOUND YOU.
I DID NOT EXPECT YOU TO SURVIVE YOUR TRAINING.
OH, NO...
BUT NOW, YOUR HATRED HAS BECOME YOUR STRENGTH. AT LAST, THE DARK SIDE IS YOUR ALLY.
RISE, MY APPRENTICE.


WHAT IS YOUR WILL, MY MASTER?
IT IS TIME TO FACE YOUR FIRST TRUE TEST.
YOUR SPIES HAVE LOCATED A JEDI?
YES. MASTER RAHM KOTA. HE IS ATTACKING A CRITICAL IMPERIAL SHIPYARD. YOU WILL KILL HIM, AND BRING ME HIS LIGHTSABER.
THE EMPEROR MUST *NOT* DISCOVER YOU. LEAVE NO WITNESSES. KILL EVERYONE ABOARD, IMPERIALS AND KOTA'S MEN ALIKE.
I... AS YOU WISH...
...MY MASTER.


DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE?
MY ORDERS ARE CLEAR. I AM TO KEEP YOUR SHIP RUNNING AND FLY YOU WHEREVER YOUR MISSIONS REQUIRE.
DID VADER TELL YOU THAT HE KILLED OUR LAST PILOT?
NO. BUT I CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT HE GAVE LORD VADER GOOD CAUSE TO DO SO. I WILL NOT.
LET'S HOPE SO. I'M SICK OF TRAINING NEW PILOTS.
WHAT IS THIS?!? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY SHIP?
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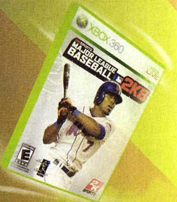
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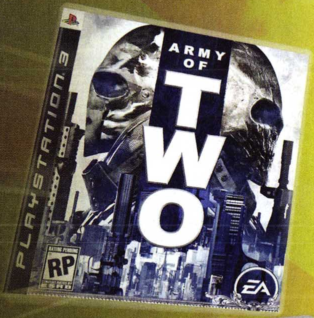
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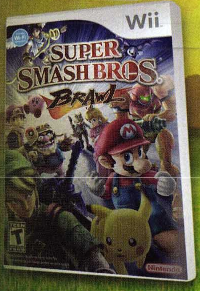
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RATINGS

★★★★★ EXCEPTIONAL

An excellent game that takes its genre to new heights.

★★★★ GREAT

Not flawless, but a truly great game and among the best in its genre.

★★★ OKAY

An overall positive experience for fans of the genre or subject matter.

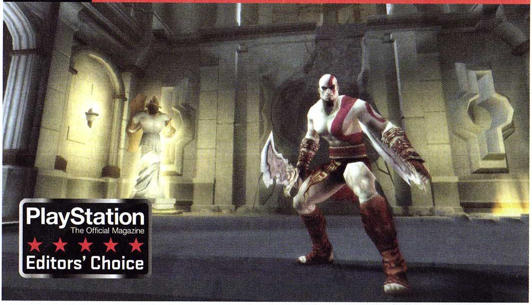
★★ POOR

Suffers from several major flaws that really damage the experience.

★ AWFUL

Not worth your time or money.

GAME of the month God of War: Chains of Olympus p 68



Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

Everyone gets hungry, even us gamers. This month, we share our preferred gaming snacks.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SNACK OF CHOICE: Is beer, Sam Adams or Boddingtons, a snack? Gaming I find good for a diet. I don't want to eat while I'm playing because of getting gunk on the controller, so I just don't eat.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *MLB 2K8, Pinball Hall of Fame*

NOW PLAYING: *PixelJunk Monsters, Rock Band*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

SNACK OF CHOICE: When I'm good, I go for cheese and apple slices. Or beef jerky. When I'm not, oh boy. Curly fries, empanadas, sashimi, you name it. Oh, and I can't resist dark chocolate. Mmm, I'm hungry now.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *God of War: Chains of Olympus, Patapon, Downstream Panic!*

NOW PLAYING: *Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness, Call of Duty 4, PixelJunk Monsters*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

SNACK OF CHOICE: Coffee, bananas, anything with chocolate in it. I love the big bags of Krinkle-Cut Kettle Chips but you can't touch anything while you're eating them.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: I pulled a couple shifts on *MLB 08* PSP.

NOW PLAYING: *MLB 08: The Show, FIFA 08, Patapon*

CASEY LYNCH
FREELANCE WRITER

SNACK OF CHOICE: When I can, I'll nibble on Spinatos pizza and wash it down with a Guinness. Heaven!

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Dynasty Warriors 6, NFL Tour*

NOW PLAYING: I am hopelessly addicted to *Burnout Paradise*. Road Rage!

CAMERON LEWIS
FREELANCE WRITER

SNACK OF CHOICE: Green seedless grapes. They're expensive right now, especially in the Northeast, but they're yummy, cheap, and won't turn you into King Kong Bundy. I swear I spend a good $20 on the darn things every week or two.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: *Obscure: The Aftermath, Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition*

NOW PLAYING: *Patapon, The Club*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

SNACK OF CHOICE: Mini powdered sugar Hostess® Donettes® immersed in Diet Coke with Lime. Mmm... *"There's a party in my tummy! So yummy, so yummy!"*

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE: My resume.

NOW PLAYING: My three-and-a-half-year-old son, Truman (AKA FireSpitter), demands that I play: "I cut heart out and make you bleed!" Yes, I should be afraid, but it's *sooo* cute when he says that.

Retro View

The big games we were playing this month in PlayStation history.

ONE YEAR AGO...

Virtua Fighter 5 (PS3)
(9.0 out of 10)

Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007 (PS2)
(9.0 out of 10)

Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters (PS2)
(8.5 out of 10)

FIVE YEARS AGO...

Def Jam Vendetta (PS2)
(9 out of 10)

MGS2: Substance (PS2)
(9 out of 10)

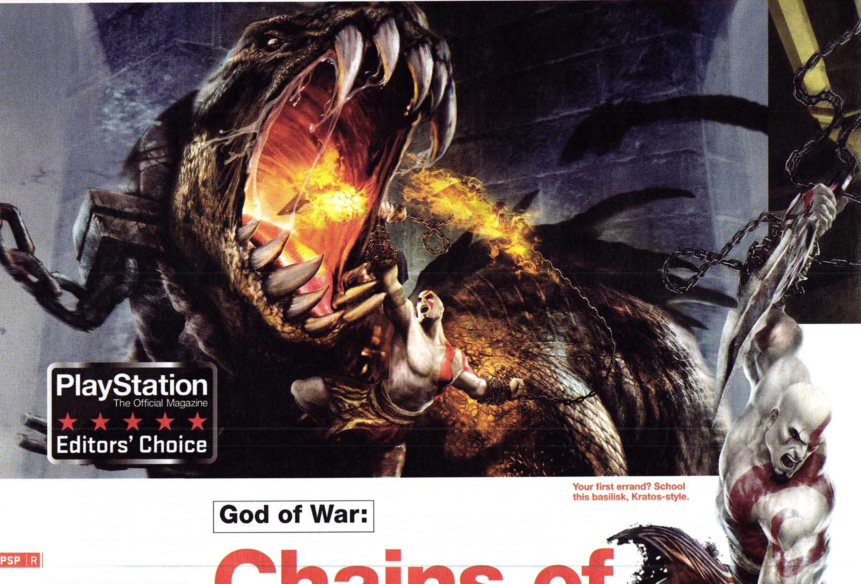
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc (PS2)
(8 out of 10)

10 YEARS AGO...

Breath of Fire III (PS1)
(4.5 stars)

Diablo (PS1)
(4.5 stars)

Hot Shots Golf (PS1)
(4 stars)



Your first errand? School this basilisk, Kratos-style.

PSP | R

God of War:

Chains of Olympus

Even a small screen can't hurt this amazing Greek epic

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Sony Computer Entertainment DEVELOPER: Ready At Dawn Studios

Kratos, the Spartan warrior whose personal tragedies rival those of daytime soap stars, has whipped, swung, and sliced his Blades of Chaos through most of ancient Greece, from Athens to the depths of the underworld. He has soaked his weapons in the blood of gods and one-eyed behemoths, undead soldiers and shrieking medusas alike. He's traversed nausea-inducing precipices, soared on the backs of griffons, and navigated the complex puzzles of brain-stumping temples.

And he's triumphed through all of it.

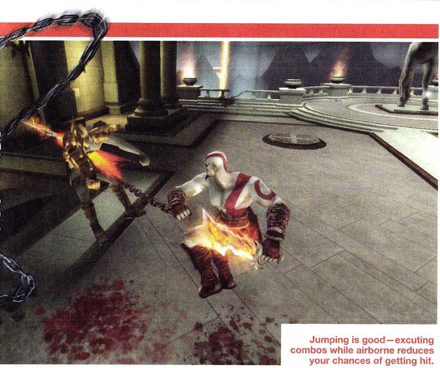
But now, the Ghost of Sparta faces a completely new challenge: translating his larger-than-life, I'll-show-Homer-the-real-meaning-of-Hubris tale onto the small screen of the PSP. And this pocket-sized *Chains of Olympus* succeeds superbly at retaining the raw, epic aura of the PS2 franchise.

Prettier than Aphrodite

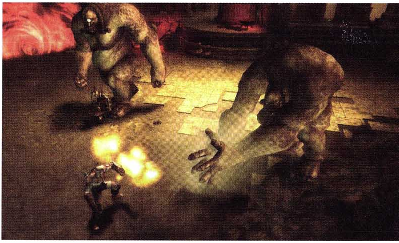
The *Chains of Olympus* story is set in the period between the original *God of War* and *God of War II*, when Kratos pledged himself as a servant of the gods. Unable to forget his angst-ridden past (for the complete story, just go play the first *God of War*), Kratos reluctantly obeys the

Arsenal of the Gods

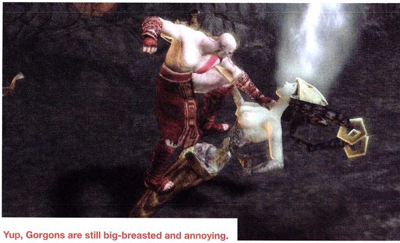
In addition to the Blades of Chaos (whip-blades chained to his wrists), Kratos will eventually obtain the Gauntlets of Zeus, a glove-like weapon that specializes in delivering slow, powerful blows, but only within a small distance. For magical abilities, Kratos will earn the Efreet (a fire elemental that pounds flames onto nearby enemies), the Light of Dawn (a ranged magical attack), and Charon's Wrath (a ranged poison that stuns enemies). Kratos will also get the Sun Shield and Triton's Lance, which lets him breathe underwater.



Jumping is good—excuting combos while airborne reduces your chances of getting hit.



Don't forget to block with your Sun Shield to deflect oncoming attacks.



Yup, Gorgons are still big-breasted and annoying.

commands of Olympus, awaiting the promised day when the gods will finally erase all his painful memories. In the meantime, he is sent to defend Attica from the attacking Persian army.

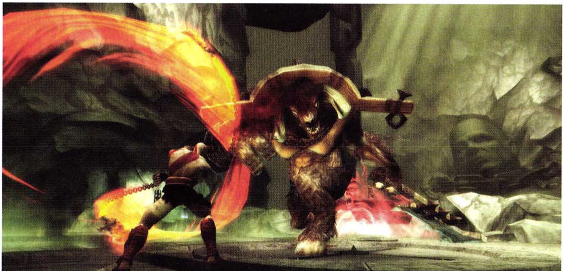
The moment the opening cut scene ends and we land on a crumbling rooftop by the sea, we know we're in for a visual treat. Giant blazing arrows fly overhead. In the distance, beneath a beautifully colored, cloud-filled sky and above waves rippling to shore, half a dozen ships do battle. And that's just the background. Up close, the roof textures are detailed and smooth, and when the occasional fiery arrow strays too close, we see the light play across enemy soldiers' shiny armor. When we attack we note that Kratos himself, though understandably smaller, is as fluid—and his attacks as pretty to admire—as ever.

We're happy to share that this level of quality is maintained throughout as Kratos journeys across Attica to the temple of the sun god Helios to Tartarus, and another location that we won't give away. Admittedly, a few areas look a little bland (some of the rocky paths in Tartarus, for example), but as they're contextually appropriate, it didn't undermine the fundamental quality. It's still graphically one of the most beautiful and visually impressive games the PSP has seen.

> "When we attack we note that Kratos himself, though understandably smaller, is as fluid—and his attacks as pretty to admire—as ever."

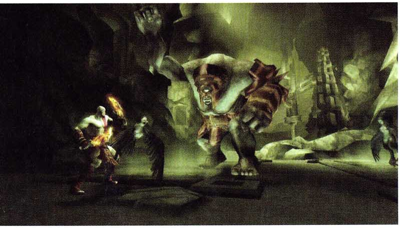
Visuals alone aren't enough to earn our recommendation, however. A game has to wow us with its gameplay—and a franchise with *God of War*'s reputation brings with it high expectaions and extra pressure to impress. Thus, when we wrestled with a colossal basilisk in a multi-part battle through a collapsing Attica (reminiscent of the opening stage in *God of War II*), we hoped to be blown away.

We weren't disappointed. The first stage is full of surprises, some that literally make us gasp out loud, and Ready at Dawn has done a fantastic job of setting up the *God of War* "feel" right from the start and carrying it through to the shocking and poignant finish.

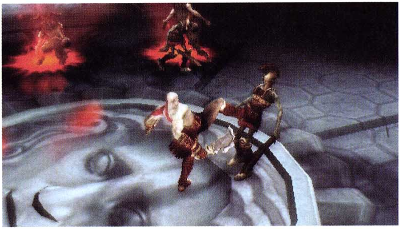


Action-oriented strategy and tactics are important, but timing is key. Block when enemies charge you; attack when they're vulnerable.

In your ten or so hours immersed in *Chains of Olympus*, you won't be doing much platforming at all.



Only having one eye doesn't make this Cyclops any less deadly.



Undead legionnaires are still one of the most common enemies you'll encounter.

Yup, you'll still find a sex mini-game in *Chains of Olympus*. In fact, you'll see a *lot* of bare breasts.

The Efreet's flame spells can disarm enemy shields.

PSP | R

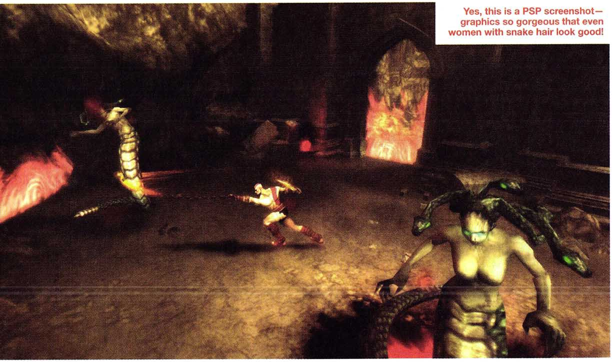
Painless PSP combat

With only one analog nub, the PSP controls must differ from those in the PS2 games, but the transition is handled extremely well, which is essential in a combo-dependent game like *God of War*. You still utilize the face buttons and nub for basic attacks and movement. Pressing the left trigger blocks; tapping it parries or flings back ranged missiles. Holding the left trigger in conjunction with a face button executes special melee abilities, and doing the same with the right trigger unleashes magical attacks. Evading is the biggest difference between the PS2 and PSP setup. Hold down the right and left triggers simultaneously and point the PSP nub in the direction you desire to evade.

It sounds complicated, and you need to use the same buttons consecutively for different moves, but the game is forgiving if you forget to let go of keys (for example, if you want to do a melee attack right after evading, but forget to let go of both triggers, the game only registers the left trigger, performing a melee move instead of the magic one, so you don't accidentally deplete your magic pool). Like the other *God of War* games, it takes practice to master the timing and the combos, but with patience, controlling the game becomes as smooth and natural as Kratos' shiny scalp.

A Tale of Mythic Proportions

While the PS2 games in the series relate Kratos' quest for revenge, *Chains of Olympus* focuses on a more personal exploration of his status as a slave of the gods. It also fills in holes about Kratos' private hopes and fears. The story is actually where *Chains of Olympus* falls an iota short of expectations. Don't get us wrong—it is epic and memorable, especially toward the end. But we spotted one too many plot holes, where events simply occur, with no logical explanation of how or why. Overall, however, if you don't ask too many questions (or if you compose your own conclusions like we did), you'll find the story powerful and entertaining, especially the last hour, which plunks you in Kratos' anguish-riddled shoes in a powerful way. (We're *dying* to give it away, but for your sakes, we must resist temptation... Ack! But it's so good!)



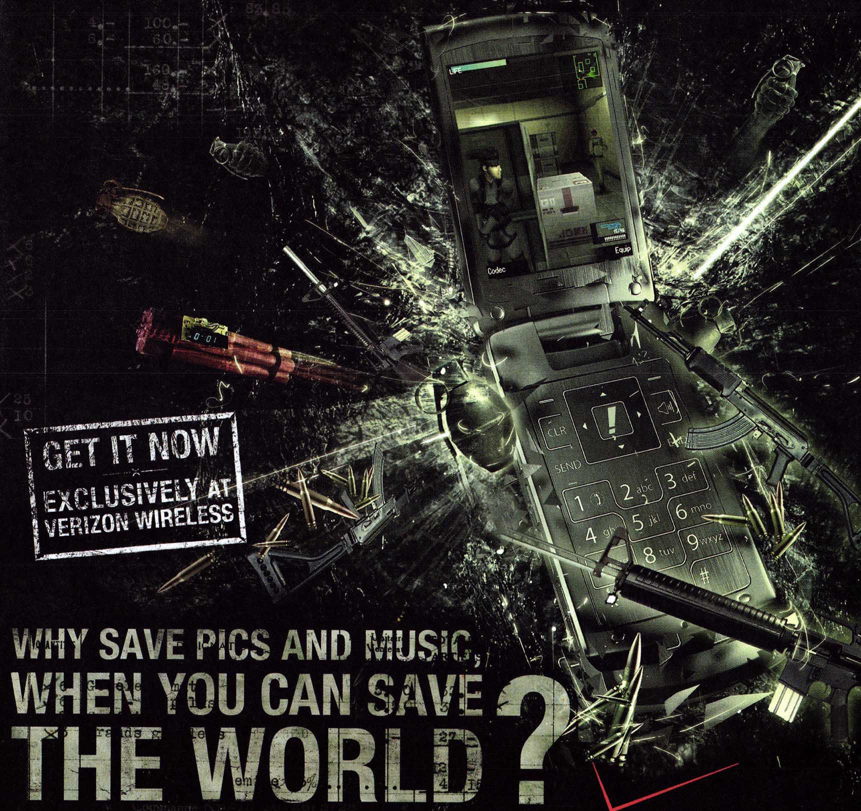
Yes, this is a PSP screenshot—graphics so gorgeous that even women with snake hair look good!

An Impressive Addition

If you're a fan of the *God of War* universe, of action-adventure titles, or of the PSP, you *must* pick up *Chains of Olympus*. Yes, there are a couple of puzzles that don't make sense and a few places where we felt like we missed something, plot-wise, but the game has such smooth action, so many fantastic encounters (one "epic battle" near the end especially tugged at our heartstrings), and such minimal load-times (the game's lack of loading screens is probably a record), that we can forgive its tiny flaws and offer it our whole-hearted recommendation. As a PSP action title, *Chain of Olympus* doesn't merely impress, it sets a new standard for the pocket-sized system's capabilities.

Teresa Dun

★★★★★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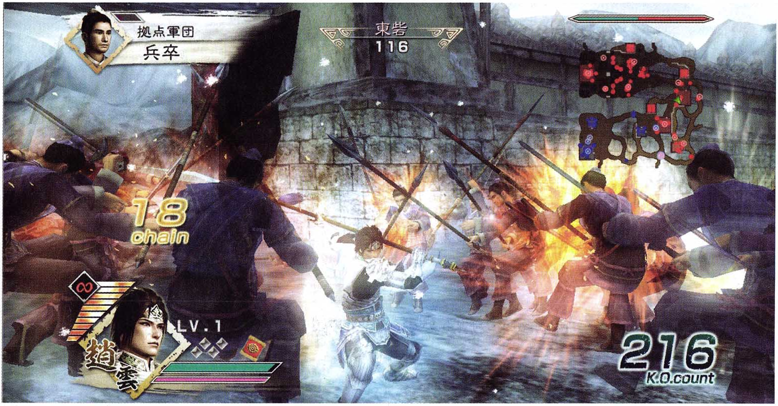


The original *Dynasty Warriors* game didn't feature the massive battle sequences its sequels are known for. Instead, it was actually a traditional fighting game a la *Soulcalibur* and *Tekken*.

Zhao Yun would be more stressed if enemies actually charged him.

Dynasty Warriors 6

How many times can KOEI make the same game? Apparently, six

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** KOEI **DEVELOPER:** Omega Force

PS3 | R

Over the last decade we've discovered two types of *Dynasty Warriors* players: those interested in the actual history of the storyline, taking on the three kingdoms and uniting China, and those who want to single-handedly thump grunts, officers, and generals by the thousands. After playing through *Dynasty Warriors 6's* Musou Mode several times, we can't see how gamers from either camp will ultimately get fired up about the next generation of this battlefield simulating action series.

A brawl is always better with big balls.

遊撃軍団
黄巾兵
119
112
chain
LV.17
125
K.O.count

To be clear, new battles, weapons, and character moves are present, as expected, but they feel obligatory at best. You'll also use a new ranking system called Renbu, which increases your damage as you fill up the gauge through four levels: one, two, three, and infinite. Plus, the dueling system from *Dynasty Warriors 4* reappears, and both these additions add to the gameplay. But we just can't get over the fact that this is essentially the same game we've been playing since *Dynasty Warriors 2* came out in 2000.

As you plow through original storylines for each playable officer you'll discover important historical information (like San Shang Xiang would make one hell of a feminist). And sure, you'll get your fill of seeing a hundred dudes on screen at once. But those elements alone aren't enough to excite us anymore.

7
chain
3
K.O.count

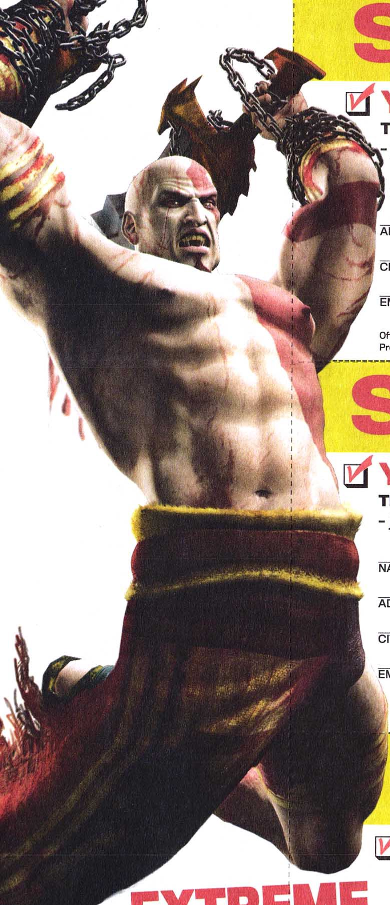
Xiahou Dun is still upset about his eye.

The game does look significantly better than *Dynasty Warriors 5,* but pop-up is still a big issue, with entire battalions "hazing" onto screen through the "fog of war." Still, the game isn't broken by any means. You can play with one or two players, which makes end game fights a bit more manageable, and you can take a character through exercises in Free mode, level them up, and then use them in Musou mode.

Of the two types of *Dynasty Warriors* players we described above, we probably fall somewhere in the middle; we like the story and we like to put the hurt on hundreds of foes at a time, but this sixth installment proper in the Dynasty Warriors franchise left us feeling like letting China fall apart—at least until KOEI makes saving it more fun.

Casey Lynch

★★



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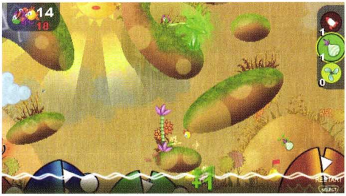
With two unlockable modes, Free Play and Survival Mode, *Downstream Panic!* offers some (limited) replayability.



If your fish don't land between the red flags (one is obscured behind the +1s), they'll get gobbled up by sharks.

Downstream Panic!

It's raining fish, hallelujah, it's raining fish.

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Atari, Inc. DEVELOPER: Eko Software

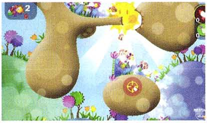
You can do more with fish than slice them up and dip them in wasabi soy sauce. When all of the ocean's fish are blasted into the sky in *Downstream Panic!* (it's best not to ask why and accept the fact that it's suddenly raining fish), you have to use gravity and water to lead them down vertical obstacle courses, back to the snug comfort of their ocean home. For each of the 80 stages, you're given an array of tools (plants that grow into barriers, rockets, etc.), which you utilize to guide the fish past pressure-triggered drawbridges, vortexes, hungry flamingos, and other treacherous obstacles.

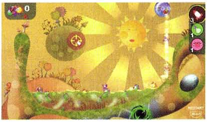
In expected fashion the puzzles become increasingly difficult, demanding careful timing and sound logical thinking—navigating the fish through most of the stages is thoroughly enjoyable. However, the game desperately needs a "skip level" or hint system. As it stands, if you're stuck, you're stuck. You won't be able to experience the rest of the game unless an epiphany strikes and you manage to solve the stage, and that's really too bad because despite the kiddy graphics, the puzzles are genuinely deep and engaging.

Teresa Dun

★★½

The pink and green barrier flower (which you plant manually) ensures that your fish fall in the direction you choose.

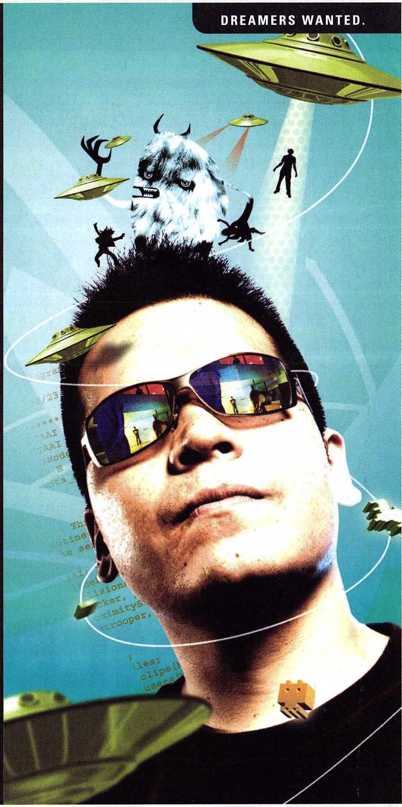




The blue ball at the top right spits out water and fish continuously, so you'll have to act quickly to save your fish in some stages.

DEGREES IN: COMPUTER ANIMATION > DIGITAL ARTS & DESIGN > ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS > FILM > GRAPHIC DESIGN > MUSIC BUSINESS > RECORDING ARTS > SHOW PRODUCTION & TOURING

DREAMERS WANTED.



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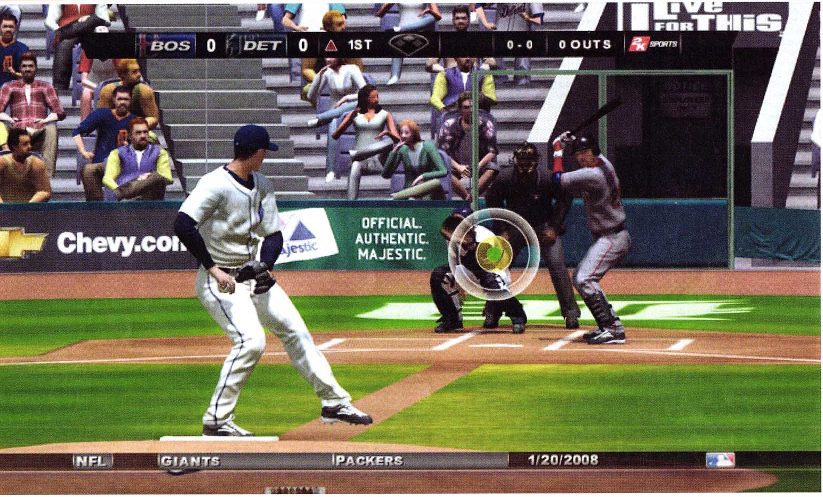


If you hit the catcher's target with the called pitch, your stats in that pitch will increase (or decrease if you miss). The expanding and deflating circles on the interface require precision and tons of practice to manipulate successfully.

PS3 | R

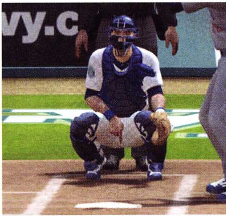
MLB 2K8

Swinging for the fences with warning track power

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: 2K Sports DEVELOPER: Kush Games

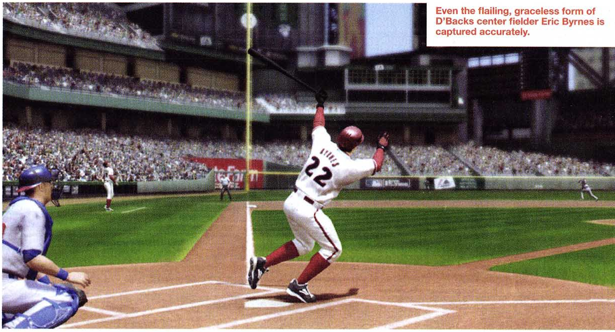
After playing so many games, manning General Manager duties in addition to the on-field action, attempting trades, and fighting like a back-street pugilist against the flashy new interactive pitching mechanism, *MLB 2K8* emerges as a contentious mix of deep baseball action and desperate frustration. Many improvements over last year's evidently rushed-to-PS3 version definitely stand out in the graphics presentation, frame rate, and a few under-the-hood options, but the on-field action itself—namely the batter/pitcher interface—actually generates aggravation, disillusionment, and the desire to hurl the controller like an Olympic discus.

Interactivity is what we're looking for; in fact, it's encouraged in the videogame space. But the all new pitching mechanism is at once deeply interactive yet also monstrously painful. The system involves using the right analog stick to select a pitch, establish its velocity, and nail its location. The three-pronged motion, culminating with timing the release of the right stick to throw the pitch, has a learning curve steep enough to be almost unassailable. While we mastered throwing the fastball fairly quickly—a straight up and down motion—trying to throw a breaking ball resulted in so many "meatballs" that we had to focus on a diet of well-placed heaters



Catchers clearly signal their pitch of choice, and do seem to make effective calls for the most part. It's just up to you, as the pitcher, to hit the target. Are you listening, meat?

“The batting system is also upgraded, giving you more effective control over your desired hit direction.”



Even the flailing, graceless form of D’Backs center fielder Eric Byrnes is captured accurately.

and lay off the cute stuff entirely. Against another human player in the multiplayer mode, this technique handicapped us both, but against the AI in a full season, it was quickly abandoned in favor of the old one-button control method.

The batting system is also upgraded, giving you more effective control over your desired hit direction. One gripe, however, is that with the speed of the ball, and even an average pitcher’s ability to paint the black of the strike zone at will, it was very hard to lay off pitches and work the count. Over time, our one-pitch outs diminished, but it added another layer of work, rather than fun, to the experience.

2K Sports’ inclusion of a full minor league system (90 real life teams, and all the players in the minors who have had major league experience, rather than all the minor leaguers—a restriction predicated by the player license) is a decent addition, and certainly contributes to the depth of gameplay here. The same goes for the trading cards that you earn for particular in-game achievements and (when populated) go online to trade. Each card, in traditional baseball fashion, shows a player and his stats, and with these cards you can create an all-time all-star team.

Around the stadiums the graphics are solid, if unspectacular. The on-field players are generally stocky, and animate well during plays, but stand awkwardly when their animation completes. It’s a weird effect, and I was waiting for the brilliant, incisive wit of commentator Jon Miller (partnered by Joe Morgan) to wax lyrical about how they look. He doesn’t, but he’s a pleasure to listen to, contributing a realistic feel to the experience even when some other off-field elements let you down.

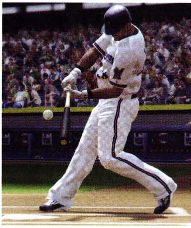
In season mode—where you can turn the GM functions on or off—we were literally one game in (a shuddering 16-4 loss to the Dodgers on the back of the opening two innings of mangled pitching control) when the news ticker from around the league informed us that Albert “Politest Naturally-imbued Power Hitter” Pujols was falling out with Tony LaRussa in St. Louis, and Miguel “Chunky” Cabrera was demanding a trade from Detroit. Can you imagine two less-likely scenarios, especially after one game? That didn’t help our suspension of disbelief (but did allow us to make a quick trade offer to the Tigers, which was duly rejected).

Some graphics glitches and frame rate dips also illustrated that despite obvious advances, 2K still hasn’t solved all its PS3 problems. And that about summed up the collective experience for *MLB 2K8.* It remains a flawed experience, even in the face of its significant upgrades in the depth and gameplay options. We weren’t able to test the online experience, but expect the trading card function to be extremely popular among hardcore fans. That said, the minor frustrations with the batter/pitcher controls may put off those hardcore baseball fanatics before they get to the meat of achieving the goals required to earn cards.

As is so often the case with annually iterative sports franchises, the improvements over last year are tangible and more than just back-of-box feature filler, but it still has a ways to go to achieve the kind of intuitive playability that will make it a pennant winner.

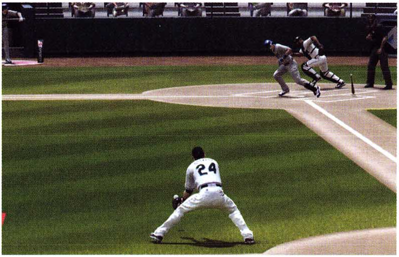
Rob Smith

★★★

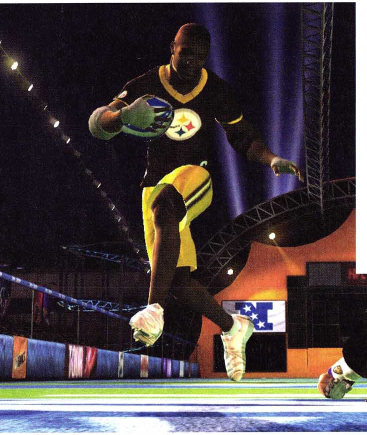


Managing all the moving parts in the control scheme can be tricky, especially when you have multiple runners trying to lead off their base for a hit-and-run.

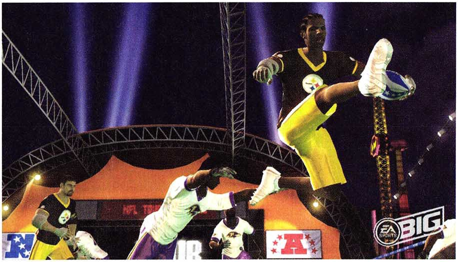
The on-field action still showcases quite a few details, like the batter stretching in the on-deck circle.



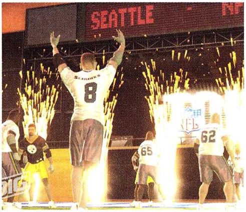
In a battle of the NL East stars, José Reyes of the Mets graces the cover for *MLB 2K8,* while Ryan Howard appears on *MLB 08: The Show.*



Precisely. *NFL Tour* makes us want to cry, too.



Forcing players to meet odd goals doesn't make *NFL Tour* any more fun.



Shiny lights may distract us, but they're not enough to disguise gameplay flaws.

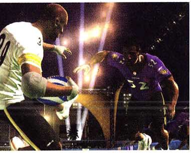
NFL Tour

More like NFL Bore

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon

PS3 | R

Even the fields have a totally different feel from *NFL Street*.



Utilizing the Sixaxis mechanic gets oh-so-tedious.

Roger Goodell must be so pleased about *NFL Tour.* As if the NFL commish didn't have enough hubbub to worry about from the rough and tumble ilk of the National Football League, the trash-talking *NFL Street* series was never one for improving the image of the NFL. Not so with *NFL Tour,* which is a more cleaned up arena ball gridiron game starring NFL luminaries—sans the cheap shotting, environmentally hazardous style of its spiritual predecessor, *NFL Street.*

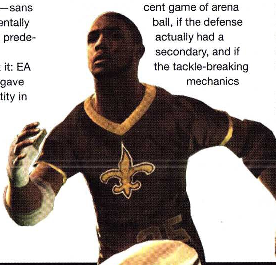
It's crazy if you think about it: EA has replaced everything that gave the *NFL Street* series its identity in the first place. Instead of the barrels, crates, and rich arenas like Gridiron Park and 2nd St. Station from Bay City in *NFL Street 2,* you play through a series of games set in what is essentially the same stadium-like arena, over and over again. Instead of the high-flying tricks, team takedowns, and player stealing we're accustomed to, you play a shallow shell of a football game that can't compete with either *Madden* or *NFL Street.* It's sterile. It's limp. It's awful.

Don't get us wrong—we're not down on *NFL Tour* merely for not being *NFL Street.* If it played a decent game of arena ball, if the defense actually had a secondary, and if the tackle-breaking mechanics weren't tied to shaking the Sixaxis (so tedious), we wouldn't be so outspoken about the suckiness contained on this Blu-ray. What's worse is that there is an attempt to spice things up with some seemingly obligatory goals, like being forced to play a game from a deficit or to win without using your running game (which you may do anyway as you can throw the same pass to the same receiver over and over without the defense adapting). But ultimately, the goals merely become tiresome because of the poor gameplay.

Multiplayer is about the only place *NFL Tour* attains any redemption, but only because some of the 'street' flavor reemerges when real people play together. Take our advice, vote with your dollars and buy a used copy of *NFL Street 2* instead.

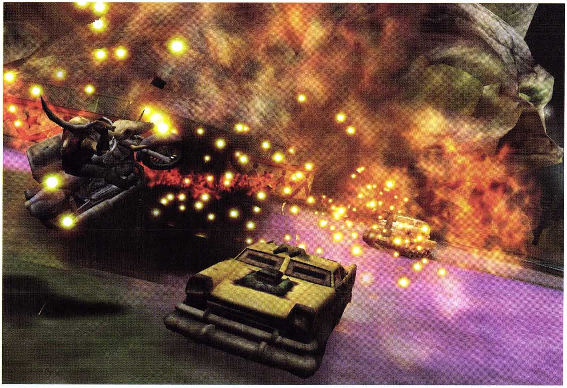
Casey Lynch

★

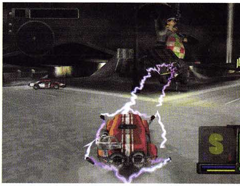


***NFL Street 2* got it right.** In Own the City mode, you could build up a custom created player and then import him into your game of *Madden 2006* for a bid at the Super Bowl. Sadly, *NFL Tour* is so last-gen you can't even upgrade your player... at all!

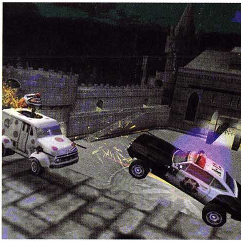
David Jaffe says there's a clue to his team's next project hidden in *Head On's* world. Can you find it?



The particle effects and explosions all look better than on the PSP, and the frame-rate never takes a dip.



There's still a raw feel to most areas that doesn't do much to push the PS2's aging hardware.



Too close for napalm; switching to guns.

Twisted Metal:

Head On: Extra Twisted Edition

The next best thing to having your own hood-mounted machine guns.

PS2 PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Sony Computer Entertainment DEVELOPER: Eat Sleep Play

PS2 | R

Don't, tempting as it may seem, dismiss *Head On* based on the fact that most of it is ported from a two-year-old PSP game. You'd miss out on a whole lot of enjoyable car-crunching mayhem if you did. The nonsensical story behind these vehicular grudge matches is as disposable as ever, but blowing the high holy hell out of the competition while laying waste to colorful and exotic locales like Paris and Egypt is a satisfying cathartic pleasure.

Each of the dozen or so wheeled bandits gets its own special signature attack, but they can all scavenge napalm, missiles, remote explosives, health, and more from the battlefield to aid in their effort to annihilate anything that moves. From Axel's giant tires to Sweet Tooth's ice cream truck, the rides require highly tuned twitch speed to control (though Mr. Grimm's motorcycle does have an annoying tendency to get hung up on wreckage occasionally). There are even four "lost levels" from the cancelled sequel to *Twisted Metal Black* that recreate that game's dark atmosphere and destructible scenery with a noticeably expanded palette.

The graphics have received a bit of an upgrade over the original PSP game—cars deform with more detail based on factors like weapon selection and damage severity, and explosions and missile trails look better—but there's still a disconcerting low-fi feel to it all. Especially when you get glimpses of, say, oddly angular rednecks hanging out of an otherwise relatively detailed RV boss vehicle.

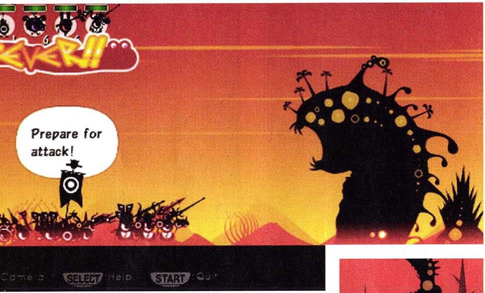
The fact that multiplayer lacks any online component and only supports two players on a split screen is more than a little disappointing. The game also hiccups every time the soundtrack swaps out the background music. But you can forgive a lot when you're getting this much classic gameplay for $20. If you never understood the *Twisted Metal* phenomenon, *Head On* won't recruit you to the choir, but everyone else will get more than their money's worth.

Cameron Lewis

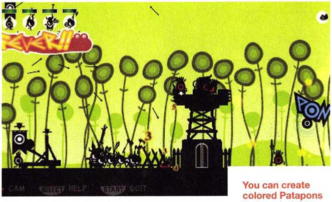
★★★½

From the Vault

Long-time players of the franchise are in for a treat when they crack open *Head On's* bonus materials. A "sweet tour" mode scatters 29 intriguing "factoids" consisting of team photos, concept art, level maps, and textual tidbits throughout the remains of a never-completed on-foot mission environment that Sweet Tooth and his signature flaming hair can explore. When you're done with that, you can soak up the hilariously poor live-action ending videos produced for the original *Twisted Metal,* and a 30-minute fan service documentary featuring interviews and anecdotes from the development team.



When you execute a string of commands without missing a beat, your Patapons will enter Fever mode, which makes them more powerful.



You can create colored Patapons (yellow, red, blue, purple) with rare materials. The different colors represent unique buffs, like fire resistance.

You can unlock musician Patapons and play rhythm mini-games with them, which nets you rare resources.

Juju (special weather effects you can activate to give you an edge in battle) can be found in various dungeons.

Patapon

"Pata Pata Pata Pon" is the beat we groove to

PSP PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Japan Studio

PSP | R

Some people march to the beat of a different drum, or so the saying goes, but the savage Patapons only march to one drumbeat: yours. And oh what a smug, satisfying feeling that reverence provides in this odd, but loveable, side-scrolling 2D rhythm game.

As the Patapons journey to the ends of the earth for reasons only these biped eyeballs understand, they face a myriad of story-based missions, like destroying the home of their arch-enemies, the Zigatons. The whole way, their ears will be tuned to the drumbeat of their almighty deity (you). But this isn't like *DDR* or *Guitar Hero,* where you're told which buttons to push and just need to time it right. Instead, you're given four-button sequences (which you have to memorize) for commands like move, attack, and dodge which you have to decide when and how to use. So when you're, say, battling a fire-breathing dragon, you can direct your Patapons to dodge flames and wait until the dragon weakens before attacking (imagine an action game, but you have to press four buttons to the beat of the music to issue a command). This rhythm-based command system feels fluid and well-executed, and after a brief learning curve, you should be able to lead your Patapons on hunts, rescue missions, and skirmishes without a hitch.

But even with *Patapon's* polished gameplay mechanics, the real beauty of the game lies in the special little touches Japan Studio included. Features like interactive backgrounds—in one mission, coins and compliments shower down on you for the rest of the level if you rescue a star—and weather effects like wind, rain, and lightning, all have an effect on gameplay and some are even controllable. And why not? You are a god after all.

The Patapons themselves are a charming cast. If you tap a rhythm right on the beat of the music, they'll sing with more enthusiasm and ferocity, toss their weapons in the air, and dance. But if you miss a note, they might faint to the ground and shout "Wet myself!" or "I want to go home!" to communicate their dismay.

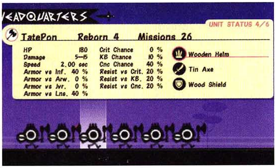
Patapon may indeed be a game so unusual that it's marching to its own beat, but Japan Studio did such a phenomenal job tying together the control, music, and art direction that we recommend grooving right along with that wondrous, delightful beat.

Teresa Dun

★★★★

Ranged soldiers, like Yumipon (spearmen) and Yaripon (bowmen), are better at hunting meat.

Bosses have at least two or three moves to use against you.



HEADQUARTERS

UNIT STATUS 4/6

TatePon Reborn 4 Missions 26

HP	180	Crit Chance	0 %	Wooden Helm
Damage	5–15	KB Chance	10 %	Tin Axe
Speed	2.00 sec	Cnc Chance	40 %	Wood Shield
Armor vs Inf.	40 %	Resist vs Crit.	20 %	
Armor vs Arw.	0 %	Resist vs KB.	20 %	
Armor vs Jvr.	0 %	Resist vs Cnc.	20 %	
Armor vs Lns.	40 %			

Clothe your Patapons in armor to boost their stats.

The Best New Web Videos
Every Day
Garbage Free
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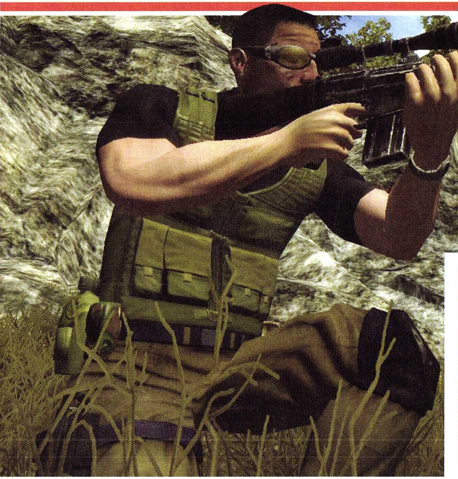
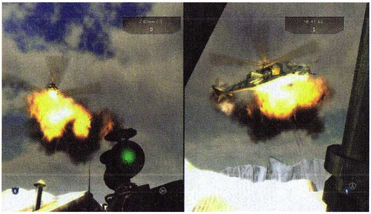


Time to bring in the big guns. Lunch doesn't sound too bad either.

With friends like these... Try sending Lang out as bait and then sniping enemies from a distance with Graves.



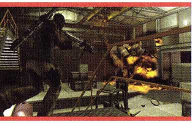
Ain't nothing like the thrill of taking down a chopper.

PS3 | R

Conflict: Denied Ops

Surprise! This budget-shooter packs a punch

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive DEVELOPER: Pivotal Games



There's no denying it: *Conflict: Denied Ops* is among the most enjoyable co-op games on the PlayStation 3. The formula is simple: send two undercover CIA operatives to volatile hot spots around the world, blow stuff up, and deny, deny, deny. That's because the "Special Activities Division" of the Agency is charged with completing missions that don't exactly stand the scrutiny of a Senate oversight committee. No, these are black ops and the official position of the United States government toward any agent captured behind enemy lines is that they don't exist.

Denied Ops is the latest entry in the *Conflict* franchise, following the *Desert Storm* and *Global Terror* titles on the PlayStation 2. While those games focused on four-man tactical teams, developer Pivotal Games has reined in the action to center around the covert two-man squad of sniper Lincoln Graves and heavy gunner Reggie Lang.

Graves is a hardened veteran and devout Christian from Alaska. Lang is a brash rookie and former football star from Miami. Together they form the CIA's version of a well-armed Odd Couple. The mission track kicks off in Venezuela, where the democratic government has been overthrown in a bloody military coup. The U.S. is sympathetic but unwilling to risk war with the new regime, headed by one General Ramirez who has threatened nuclear attack should the U.S. intervene. Officially, the U.S. decides not to get involved. Unofficially, Graves and Lang are locked and loaded.

While the two agents have a dysfunctional relationship—Lang usually refers to Graves affectionately as "redneck"—they complement each other perfectly in the field. Graves is a recon specialist and an ace with the 7.62mm sniper rifle. Lang prefers to bust through enemy lines and lay down suppressing fire with his 5.56 light machine gun. Stepping into either soldier's boots and playing to his strengths is immensely rewarding as you not only outgun the enemy, you out think him.

You can swap between Graves and Lang on the fly, depending on the combat situation or simply your preferred style of play. Graves is best used to perform overwatch, picking off foes from afar while Lang charges in machine gun blazing. Lang is best used to pin enemies down while Graves disarms chemical weapons and hacks enemy MacBooks for intel (and maybe illegally-downloaded music). It's fast, tactical gameplay that separates itself from half-hearted attempts at two-man tag-team style. We're looking at you, *Kane & Lynch.*

One drawback to this system is that you can't pick up enemy weapons, so the selection seems limited compared to other shooters in the genre. At least both agents are rewarded significant upgrades after completing each mission, including a shotgun attachment and gun camera for Graves and a rocket launcher for Lang.

The enemy AI ranges from poor to excellent. Occasionally you encounter a soldier absently daydreaming while you train your crosshairs on his forehead. Another time, an enemy might toss a smoke grenade to escape suppressing fire and seek new cover. But ultimately, success hinges on how well *you* balance the skills of Graves and Lang.

Thankfully, there'a a user-friendly command system at your disposal. With the touch of a button you can order the other agent to move to a designated spot, provide fire on an enemy, or rally on your position. Rather than a convoluted menu system, you simply point and click and your agents will do your bidding. Handling your two-man strike force across the open spaces and tight corridors of the game's ten missions is a breeze. Set in Venezuelan ruins, a Russian submarine base, and Rwandan township the locations are designed to call on both agents to shine in different situations. Graves may have to go for a long-range headshot while Lang will have to take down an attack chopper with a heat-seeking missile. It's a simple formula, but still one of the best co-op modes around. Yelling "Cover me!" never felt so good. Of course, this system works even better with a friend during a co-op session via split screen, LAN, or PlayStation Network.

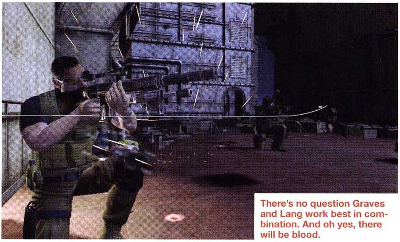
Denied Ops is not without its problems, however. Aside from a few decent explosive effects, the game looks like a high-end PlayStation 2 title. The textures, environments, and characters are all bland. Pivotal did do well to enlist composer Richard Jacques of *Mass Effect* fame to pen the military-themed score that will get your blood pumping.

While *Denied Ops* does have that budget title feel to it (and indeed retails for only $49.99), its blend of two-man tactics and solid co-op gameplay make this a decent choice for tactical shooter fans. It doesn't exactly harness the power of the PS3, but *Denied Ops* is one of this spring's pleasant surprises.

Jonathan Miller

★★★½

Actually, we *did* start the fire.



There's no question Graves and Lang work best in combination. And oh yes, there will be blood.

Graves is fast but can't take much damage. Use his gun camera to assess the battlefield from behind cover and avoid enemy fire.

> "Occasionally you run into a soldier absently daydreaming while you train your crosshairs on his forehead."

Real World Rwanda

Pivotal is not a developer that shies away from real-world events – just see *Conflict: Desert Storm.* In *Denied Ops,* you'll head to the Matuwe Township in Rwanda where Hutu Power organizations continue the terrible genocide that plagued the region in 1994. This time around, the Interahamwe don't get far with Graves and Lang on the ground.

There's a medical condition you won't see on *House* any time soon.

Don't even try simply running away from monsters, or you'll be taking a dirt nap in no time.

Make sure you snag the stun gun early in the game: it'll make your life so much easier later on.

Obscure: The Aftermath

Hackneyed horror on a budget

PS2 PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment DEVELOPER: Hydravision Entertainment

PS2 | **R**

Even when using the chainsaw on gluttonous assailants, the level of gore isn't exactly overwhelming.

Tag Team Terror

Recruit a friend to your adventure, and he or she can take control of the second character that normally trails behind you. Human allies aren't terribly handy for normal exploration and puzzle-solving tasks most of the time, but they do tend to be much more helpful in combat situations, especially if you're out of bullets.

Corey and Amy shed light on another grisly supernatural crime scene.

The botanical nastiness unleashed on Leafmore High in the original *Obscure* might be little more than a memory at the opening of the sequel set two years later. But the nightmare has only just begun for the students of Fallcreek University. A strange new flower has appeared on the campus, and you know how college kids are: they'll smoke anything.

After an initial round of hallucinations and creep-out, you control two of six Fallcreek students at a time, swapping your lead and backup characters at periodic meeting spots. The overall plot arch of the game is obscure (hence the title?), but you're generally trying to unravel the mystery behind the return of the plants. Play settles into a largely linear routine, drawing heavily from the *Resident Evil* school of abysmal dialogue and inexplicably obtuse puzzles. *Obscure's* enigmas aren't particularly challenging or difficult, and they occasionally even make sense—using a spotlight to snuff out a strange dark presence is only natural, after all. But most rely on an arbitrary arrangement of objects or word scramble hacking, and some even seem cribbed outright from other games.

As you explore a rather plain world made dramatic by liberal use of simulated film grain and forebodingly canted camera angles, you'll switch back and forth between you and your sidekick, taking advantage of different skills. (Kenny has the strength to move heavy objects, Corey can shimmy along ledges, and so forth.) When one or more dim creeps come out of hiding, you hold down L1 to target, and fire shots or swing melee weapons with R1, but the combat experience is clunky at best. Too often you'll target a monster across the room instead of the one right on top of you, and ammo is ridiculously scarce. It's far too easy to miss important items early on and cripple your chances later, but frustration seldom reaches that boiling point where you feel like throwing up your hands in defeat. Conversely, the dull sense of minor accomplishment upon completing the game isn't terribly satisfying.

You can't swing a severed limb without hitting half a dozen survival horror games these days, but as much as *Obscure: The Aftermath* is crippled by its soulless narrative and slavish adherence to cookie-cutter genre patterns, $20 still buys you enough spooky atmosphere and frightening moments for hardcore horror fans to rationalize further investigation.

Cameron Lewis

★★⯨

This sequel has actually been out in the UK since September of last year.

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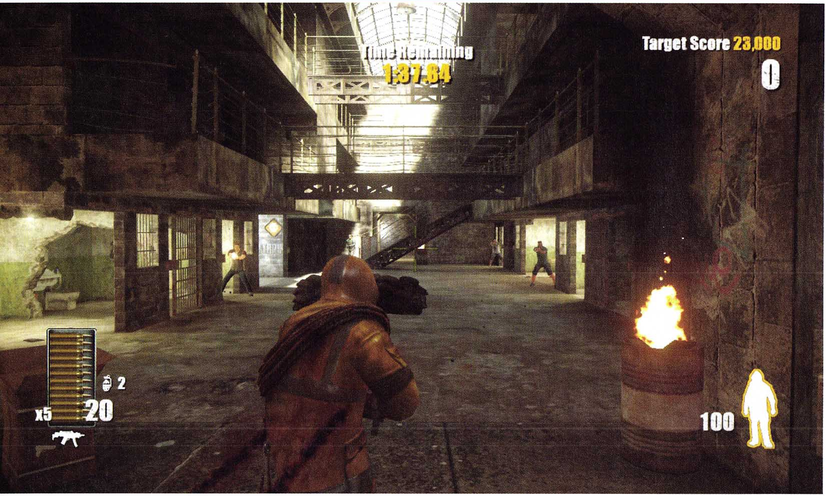


The Club is as close as you can get to a third-person shooting gallery.

Look out for the Callahan 357, a powerful magnum pistol named after a certain Dirty Harry. Do you feel lucky?

PS3 | R

The Club

Membership does not have its benefits

PS3 PRICE: $59.95 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Bizarre Creations

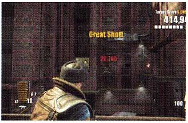
Best known for the superb *Project Gotham Racing* series as well as an addictive little shooter called *Geometry Wars*, developer Bizarre Creations strays from its beaten path with *The Club*, a new brand of third-person action shooter. Instead of focusing on important little details like depth, character development, and player progression, *The Club* emphasizes arcade-style shooting so extensively that it should come with a quarter slot. You're rewarded for killing with style and killing en masse. After you take down an enemy, your "killbar" meter will max out. Try to string together kills before the timer runs out to build combo multipliers, earning bonus points for explosive kills and headshots along the way. The only goal is to score as many points in as short of a time as possible. If you play *The Club* with that in mind, you're more likely to enjoy the game than if you go in expecting a competitor to more typical story-driven shooters.

You choose from eight rather clichéd characters—the criminal, the cop, and the crazed Australian among them—and guide them through eight rather clichéd environments, including a warehouse, a bunker, and of course, a war zone. Bizarre's stab at conjuring a story for this setup is, well, a little bizarre. The Club is a secret and ultra-exclusive organization of heads-of-state, mob bosses, business magnates, drug lords, and probably even Madonna. Its members have a taste for violence that can only be satisfied by these underground death tournaments, a bloody blend of *Fight Club* and the Schwarzenegger classic *The Running Man.* Be it revenge, extortion, or simply a new thrill, each character has his own motivation for taking on The Club. Sadly, you don't.

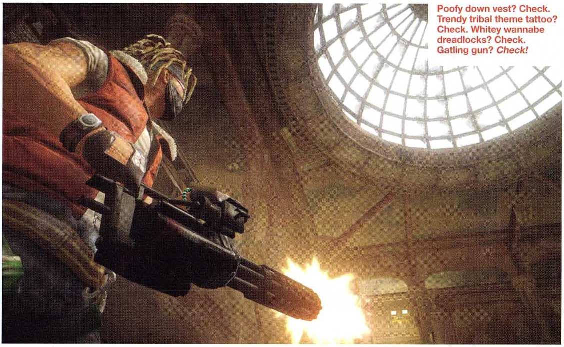
The enemy AI is scripted and rather simple. Enemies basically stand there and shoot at you. This works with the arcade-scoring mechanic as you can play each level over and over to earn top spot on the online leaderboards. While getting that perfect run feels great, it will only hold your attention

The Club Secretary

While we quietly suspect George W. Bush and Leonardo DiCaprio to be the true leaders of The Club, the face of this dastardly organization belongs to the Membership Secretary. Along with organizing events and choosing the venues, the Secretary also has a dark secret that can only be learned by beating the game with Nemo (a playable character, not the fish). Hooray for mystery!



Rack up bonus points for long-range head shots.



Poofy down vest? Check. Trendy tribal theme tattoo? Check. Whitey wannabe dreadlocks? Check. Gatling gun? *Check!*

for so long before you zone in on the game's limitations. You're left with very few creative options for offing your opponents. Instead of getting massive bonus points for, say, triggering a chain explosion of oil barrels and crates of fireworks, you're forced to simply aim at a nondescript bad guy, shoot, and repeat. A decent selection of pistols, machine guns, and heavy weapons form your arsenal along the way, but none are upgradeable or stand out significantly. One exception is the rocket launcher, which is also great at launching enemies through the roof. Nice.

The bulk of the game is in the single-player tournament mode where you'll traverse the globe and compete in five event categories: sprint, siege, time attack, survivor, and run the gauntlet. The events blend together since the only real goal is to rack up points and, you know, stay alive. Although you'll get a handful of events for each tournament venue, the areas are relatively small and you'll travel the same alleys and rooms over and over. This wouldn't be so bad if the events were held in beautiful, lush environments, but for such expensive tastes, it's a mystery why *The Club* continually chooses to engage its fetish in prisons and steel mills, at times indistinguishable from one another. The venues are uninspired, but they are at least well designed for the killbar scoring style, as you're forced to clear a room and sprint to the next area to keep your combination going.

At the end of the tournament, you're privy to a quick cut scene wrap up for each of the eight characters. Don't expect any deep plot twists or revelations here: these scenes will often leave you scratching your head more than a rejected M. Knight Shyamalan script.

The multiplayer modes prove more fun as human opponents put up a better fight than those working for The Club. The modes are typical deathmatch, assassination, and infiltration scenarios, but you can choose to play using a kill count or *The Club's* killbar scoring system, which adds a replayable twist to the action.

Unfortunately, the all-too-brief stints of white-knuckle action don't deliver the memorable impact required for us to recommend *The Club*. The sound, visuals, and gameplay all perform in the decidedly average range, and you can get almost the same arcade-shooting experience as a bonus mode in the superlative *Call of Duty 4*. *The Club* is a fine idea in theory and a decent effort in a new genre for Bizarre, but the game simply isn't engaging with its lack of epic moments or fleshed-out storylines. If this were the arcade, you'd pump in a handful of quarters and then move on.

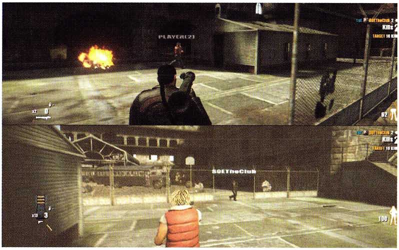
Jonathan Miller

★★½

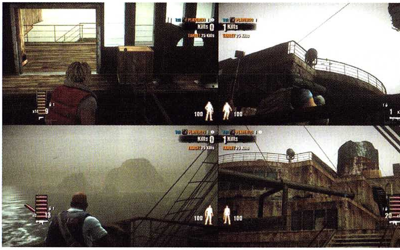
Cultured Personality

The Club takes place in the United States, the former Soviet Union, Great Britain, Italy, and Germany. While you won't find any significant international landmarks outside of the canals of Venice, you have to give credit to the sound team for recording profanity in four different languages. That's hot *merde*.

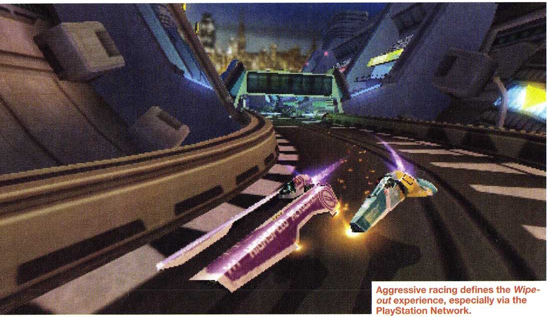
Ricochet a bullet off a wall to nail an enemy hiding behind a corner to earn the Ric-o-slay point bonus.



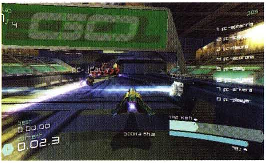
Turn on killbar scoring to heat up multiplayer battles.



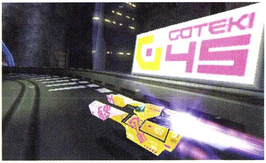
Love, exciting and new. Come aboard, we're expecting you.



Aggressive racing defines the *Wipeout* experience, especially via the PlayStation Network.



"Mag strips" allow for looping, roller coaster-esque sections in the courses.



Pulse tracks nearly every imaginable stat—even how long you've viewed the stats!

Loyalty points allow players to unlock ship skins—and perhaps develop some team pride.

Wipeout Pulse

Still the fastest thing on UMD

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCE Studio Liverpool

Talk about a slow burn: It's been nearly three whole years since we first whipped around the tracks in Sony's brilliant PSP launch title, *Wipeout Pure,* and while free downloadable content eased the wait a bit, this proper sequel is long overdue.

Thankfully, *Wipeout Pulse* maintains all of the key elements that keep the franchise atop the hovercraft racing subgenre (insane speed, strategic weaponry, tight controls, and fluid visuals), while adding some much-desired longevity to the experience. *Pulse* packs more than 230 events in its epic single-player campaign, including the new Speed Lap and deathmatch-esque Eliminator play modes. While neither event delivers the concise thrills of a standard race, both allow you some choice in how you earn the points needed to progress through the campaign.

Extensive gameplay quantity can be something of a double-edged sword for a title like this (especially on a handheld), as it takes a considerable amount of time to unlock all 12 tracks. It's worth it—the looping later tracks (notably Outpost 7) are among the most compelling rides in franchise history—but the repetition in the first few grids and the lengthy nature of the new event modes can initially make the campaign feel like a grind.

Even with all the solo bulk, the most exciting addition to *Wipeout Pulse* is undoubtedly that of Wi-Fi play via the PSP's Infrastructure mode. With little hassle, we were able to hop onto the PlayStation Network servers and take part in eight-player races and tournaments, which are as smooth and chaotic as we'd dreamed. Eight racers can also duke it out through a local Ad Hoc connection, but the smart interface and lag-free play make online a fantastic choice for on-the-spot competition.

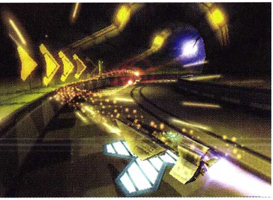
Perhaps due to the long layoff or the occasional monotony of the single-player campaign, *Pulse* may not seem as fresh or essential as its predecessor, but that's a nitpick considering its wealth of quality gameplay. We're still amped about the upcoming *Wipeout HD* on PlayStation Network, but with online play and the promise of fresh content (see boxout), we suspect our PSPs will be *Pulse*-ating for months to come.

Andrew Hayward

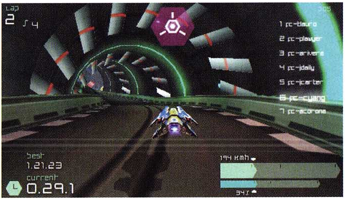
★★★★

DLC Soon?

As with *Pure, Wipeout Pulse* is expected to receive content updates (such as new tracks) via its official website, but SCEA could not confirm dates or details. SCE Europe offered four DLC packs in February for GBP 3.49 each. Hopefully, the U.S. will see free (or cheaper) content soon.



Hit the weapon strips for missiles and mines.



A clear track means you're in first place—or dead last.

Kobayashi is the leading light in competitive eating, having won the annual hot dog eating contest at Nathan's six of the last seven years.

That *Fun House* dude is just plain creepy.

Pinball Hall of Fame:

The Williams Collection

A nostalgic trip down pinball lane

PS2 PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Crave Entertainment DEVELOPER: FarSight Studios

Cast your mind back to the 1980s—if it reaches back that far—when arcades ruled. Alongside *Pac-Man* machines sat the colorful, blinking, and buzzing pinball tables, consuming quarters like Kobayashi on a Wienerschnitzel bender as high score addicts emulated the lead character from The Who's seminal rock opera. Table manufacturer Williams was in its element, producing a vast number of machines that challenged flipper fingers while pushing the available technology to the limit.

This Hall of Fame collection brings together eight tables (with additional unlockables) that illustrate how the designs were so much less accommodating than many you'll find today. A table like *Gorgar* stood out for being the first to "talk" to players. But it's a very basic table, and also suffers glitches in this version such as the ball appearing to pass through the flipper. We only witnessed that problem on this one table.

Among the Williams classics are *Space Shuttle*—a superbly designed table that still holds up, *Black Knight, Fun House, Taxi,* and *Pinbot.* All of these are solid designs that provide a challenge for the nostalgic pinball fan. However, the floaty ball physics and the surprisingly unresponsive flipper controls remind you that this is a game, not a simulation. The more complex tables—like *Fun House* and *Taxi*—suffer the most with the ball slowing down and floating across these accurately recreated surfaces. *Black Knight* probably performs the best with a swift pace that didn't chug even during the three-ball multiball.

Between the free play for fun and the challenges that require you to achieve a certain score before moving on to the next table this is a solid reminisce for pinball fanatics still working their PS2s, and who probably have a perfectly maintained *Space Shuttle* in the basement.

Rob Smith

★★★

Taxi is colorful, detailed, but a tad too slow.

You can collect rings to upgrade your racer mid-course, but the meager payoff is hardly worth the effort.

Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity

Sonic rides... and dies.

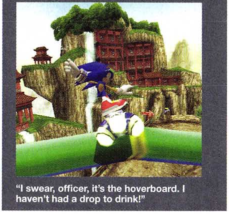
PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Sonic Team

As it is with gravity, what goes up must come down. Such is the case with Sonic the Hedgehog, that lovable spinning rodent that won us over in the days we gamed with only 16-bits. Sonic has fallen on hard times of late, forced to ride uncontrollable hover boards across poorly-designed race tracks in *Sonic Riders,* and same again in the sequel, *Zero Gravity.*

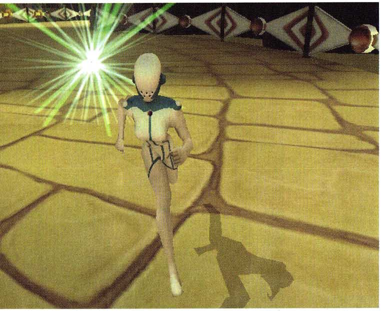
Although Sonic and his mates can now upgrade their boards and use mind-bending maneuvers like the Gravity Dive and Meteor Burst, the track design is often confusing and the controls unwieldy. One small mistake will leave you eating robot dust. That's just not the Sonic we used to know and love.

Jonathan Miller

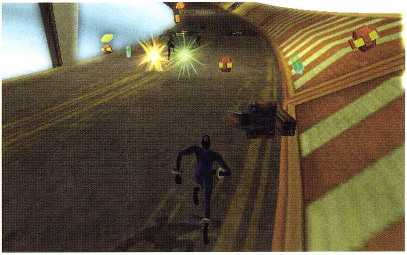
★★



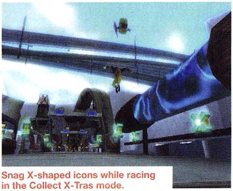
"I swear, officer, it's the hoverboard. I haven't had a drop to drink!"



Multi-colored spandex adorns the majority of the racers, but their names are just laughable. Buff Lo, anyone?



Selectable pods determine your attack and shield strength.



Snag X-shaped icons while racing in the Collect X-Tras mode.

Iridium Runners

Only thumbs will ache after this marathon

PS2 PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SouthPeak Games DEVELOPER: Playstos Entertainment

Years ago, foot-racing games like *Running Wild* and *Mad Dash Racing* tried to penetrate the market, but ran into the proverbial brick wall, all but killing this subgenre—until now. *Iridium Runners* revives the on-foot racer, but instead of utilizing anthropomorphic zoo animals like its predecessors, it features bodysuit-clad humans sprinting through winding, futuristic paths. The gameplay is similar to a kart racer, with boost panels, weapon pick-ups, and a stamina meter that allows you to mash the X button for extra speed when filled.

Just six core tracks set the stage for *Iridium Runners,* with six more unlockable via the Championship mode. And though the inventive art design and diverse locales make these stages a treat to survey, with so few tracks, déjà vu is sadly unavoidable. We wish there were more!

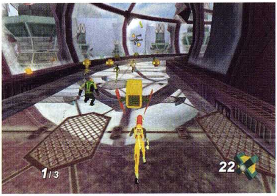
Along with traditional multi-lap jaunts to the finish line, a Collect X-Tras mode creates a unique race experience in which the final result depends both on your speed and the collection of items littered around the track. A Survival Lap Knockout mode is also included, but the phrase "speed kills" hardly applies in *Iridium Runners,* as the runners merely mosey around the tracks, only picking up the pace when you repeatedly jam on the X button. And that, believe us, grows tiresome during an 11 minute elimination race.

Curious quirks regularly rear their head, most notably the apparent lack of a decent turning mechanism (we constantly fought the controller to take tight curves, typically to no avail). It's as if the code was accidentally overwritten; even the AI racers smash into the walls!

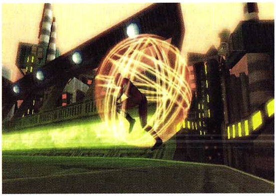
And while the devastatingly powerful weapons (such as a ray that temporarily shrinks competitors and an electric barrier to halt oncoming racers) offer an interesting set of abilities, several annoyances prevail: Why can't the shield pickup protect against all attacks? Why on earth does the sticky goo attack launch directly in front of you, typically snaring your runner in the process?

Perhaps the most frustrating characteristic of *Iridium Runners* is its wasted potential. Some may scoff at that notion due to the game's budget status, but the diverse level designs and mocked-up loading screen ads hint at design ideas more substantial than just jogging in circles. But once you see the hokey characters (with names like Starball and Tankbob) and the otherwise straightforward presentation and gameplay, it becomes obvious that creativity was stunted somewhere along the line.

While the criticisms may seem extensive, there's still a fairly decent (if repetitive) play experience to be had here—especially for those seeking four-player split screen play. Core gamers won't (and shouldn't) hesitate to pass on the game, but last-gen leftovers are typically much more uninspired than this.



Only six core settings, but the art design impresses.



The shield pick-up oddly still succumbs to some attacks.

Andrew Hayward

★★

Italian developer Playstos Entertainment previously crafted *Ruff Trigger: The Vanocore Conspiracy,* a surprisingly blatant *Ratchet & Clank* clone.

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FINAL FANTASY ADORATION

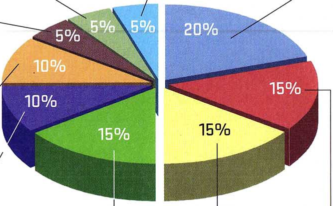
Moogles, chocobos, materia, summons... When it comes to *Final Fantasy*, no detail is too small. You guys love it all.

Every time we open our inboxes it's like a warm, spring shower of pure *Final Fantasy* love pours over us, courtesy of you, our readers. Though our inboxes are brimming to the point of exploding from entries to the *Crisis Core* contest in our February issue, we just sit in a dreamy haze while we read through them, reliving all your favorite parts of the game. Ah, what sweet nostalgia.

While the winners to the contest will be chosen randomly and printed in our May issue, we thought you might be curious what other *FF* fans have to say.

BREAK ME OFF A PIECE OF THAT *FINAL FANTASY* PIE

We received thousands of submissions to our contest. Obviously, we couldn't fit every single one into the chart below, but take a look to see what PTOM readers like best about *Final Fantasy*.



Secrets
Secret characters, secret bosses, secret weapons, spells, and skills—from what we've read, you guys are willing to invest the time to discover it all. *FF* fans are among the most faithful we've seen.

Chocobos
That includes the chocobo summons, breeding chocobos, and chocobo racing... and of course, the elusive golden chocobo!

Characters
Cloud received the most votes, with Tifa and Sephiroth close behind. Other close calls: Aerith, Zack, and Vincent.

Everything Else
And then, there's everything that didn't get enough votes to fit into its own category but did get enough to be mentioned, including:

- Weapons (Ultimate, Ruby, Emerald)
- The ironic title
- Recurring characters
- The Hair
- Moogles
- Mini-games

Art
You love the character designs and how each game in the series looks better and better. You also like the CG clips.

World
From Cosmo Canyon to the Golden Chocobo, many locales were mentioned. But what you admired most about the world is the way it changes from game to game yet somehow retains the "feel" of the series.

Battle System
FFVII's materia and summons/espers are equally loved. Limit Breaks and overdrives were mentioned, too.

Story
You loved the story's complexity first, romance second, and immersive "realness" third.

Music
You said *FF*'s music is memorable, epic, high quality, and full of emotion. One reader called it, "happy music that drives me nuts in a hyper way." Whee!

OFFICIAL FF MERCH

SOLDIER key ring... Part of the winner's prize pack.

Silver LOVELESS locket, with Swarovski Crystals. Talk about bling!

Who would've thought the PS1's Cloud could evolve this much?

Cloud perched atop his trusty bike, Hardy Daytona.

Final Fantasy food for thought

Helping prove that videogames inspire creativity, art, and thoughtful composition, many letters we received about *Final Fantasy* were particularly endearing. We received so many touching, funny, and eloquent notes about why the series is great that we just had to share some with you. We especially enjoyed the inspiring stories some folks told about how *Final Fantasy* has made their lives just a little bit brighter and cheerier. Here's what you had to say:

> “The plots are so original! I mean, how many Chocobos, Moogles, and/or Blitzballs do you see in the average videogame?” *–Melissa Mederos*

> “The greatest thing *Final Fantasy* has done for me would have to be helping me make friends. I am a military kid and have had to move often. The game let me make my first friend in Wyoming and helped break the ice when I moved here to Colorado.” *–Michael Ratterree*

> “I wrote a poem about Aerith for my poetry competition my senior year in high school. After I read it some of the other contestants started cheering. So, it just goes to show I'm not the biggest nerd.” *–John Bob*

> “My favorite thing about *Final Fantasy* is what I've learned from it, that I should never take anything for granted and to cherish and protect the things I love.” *–Carli Smith*

Ah, we could bask in this delicious fragrance forever. Keep rockin' *FF* lovers! Remember, winners will be announced next issue (you just might see a full *Crisis Core* review, too).

Aerith! We love you. Please come grace our shelves. (Cloud can come, too.)

This Sephiroth replica is made of cloth, metal, *and* leather. Impressive!

A NEWBIE'S GUIDE TO THE UT3 MOD SCENE

Modding and *Unreal Tournament* are like two peas in a flexible, gamer-friendly pod: throw them onto a bed of creativity, mix in two cups of talent and a pinch of community feedback, toss the concoction well, and you'll likely end up with one delicious recipe after another. Previously, these *UT* delicacies were reserved for PC gamers, but with *UT3* available on the PS3, PlayStation fans can now sample the goods, too. We decided a quick F.A.Q. on how you can join the feast was in order.

FOR THE UT3 PLAYER:

Q: What types of mods are currently available for the PS3 and where can I find them?

A: Multiplayer maps for all the different *UT3* modes—Deathmatch, CTF, and Warfare—are available for PS3. Our current favorites include creator FreEp's FlatWars and Bedroom Deathmatch Maps, which drops a mini-you into a giant-sized house. We're also fans of Wolfgang187's *Quake 3* Arena CTF map replica. The best place to get mods for now is the official *UT3* forums: http://utforums.epicgames.com.

Q: How do I get mods onto my PS3?

A: You have two choices. First, you can download the mods from your PC and unzip them onto a PS3 readable memory device (such as a USB memory stick, digital camera memory card, or even an iPod). You can then import them onto your PS3 by plugging in the device, booting up *UT3*, and then going into the My Content section of the Community menu. Check out http://utforums.epicgames.com/showthread.php?t=593988 for a step-by-step guide.

Alternately, you can set up your PS3 in such a way that you can view and download *UT3* mods directly from your PS3's internet browser, though you'll still need a PS3 readable memory device for the initial configuration. A full tutorial (video or text) can be found at www.ut3mod.com.

FOR THE ASPIRING UT3 MODDER:

Q: What programs do I need to start modding?

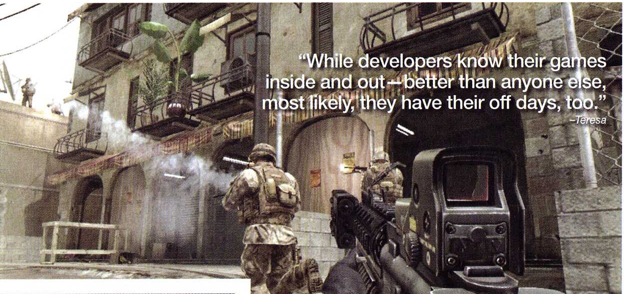
A: The bad news is, to make PS3 mods, you'll have to buy a copy of the PC version of *UT3*, which comes with the Unreal Engine 3 Toolset. (The PS3 version doesn't.) The PC Collector's Edition (ten bucks more than the non-Collector's Edition) comes with video tutorials of how to use the Unreal Engine. If you want to make your own models as well, you'll need modeling software (like 3D Studio Max or Maya) and bitmap editing software (like Photoshop).

Q: Where can I learn the first steps to modding?

A: Here are some good sites for the new *UT3* modder:
http://udn.epicgames.com/Three/UT3ModHome.html
The official Unreal Engine site.
http://utforums.epicgames.com/showthread.php?t=598243
Waylan, a *UT* forum user, posts up tutorials.
http://wiki.beyondunreal.com/wiki/
A wiki for all Unreal Engine-related content.

Letters

Feedback, Insight, Critical Judgment, and some crazy #%@*!



> "While developers know their games inside and out—better than anyone else, most likely, they have their off days, too."
> –Teresa

Checkpoint Reached.

Imagine *CoD4* without perk limits...

A LITTLE TOO PERKY

In Robert Bowling's "*Call of Duty 4* Multiplayer Tips: Creating Custom Classes" article in issue #2 (Jan. 08), Bowling states that during attacking and defending game types, he uses an M4 Carbine with M203 Grenade Launcher attachment as a primary weapon, a .45 USP as a pistol, 3x Extra Frag Grenades as perk 1, Sonic Boom as perk 2, and Martrydom as perk 3. Unfortunately, if he is using a M203 Grenade Launcher attachment, he would not be able to set his first perk to 3x Extra Frag Grenades (the M203 Grenade Launcher replaces perk 1).

Jason Bowen, The Internet

Teresa: Thanks for pointing that out, Jason. We've actually received a couple of letters about that. What can we say... While developers know their games inside and out—better than anyone else, most likely—they have their off days, too. Games go through so many tweaks (especially as release dates loom nearer and nearer) that it's possible Mr. Bowling was referring to an earlier version of the game. Or it could just be that the coffee machine was broken that day and he had been chased by a herd of escaped zebras the night before, so he was writing from a quasi-comatose and slightly hallucinatory perspective (like we do all the time). Tough call.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Plus One to the PS3 Fold

Let me start off by telling you that I am 40 years young. I started playing video games in the local video arcade when I was about 8 years old. I played the Sega Genesis, PS1, and Nintendo 64. As I got older, I was always looking for more adult games that had better graphics so I started playing all my games on the PC. I thought I would never come back to the console systems. Why would I? They are designed for kids or at least that's what I thought. When my PC was starting to show its age, instead of dropping $2,000.00 on a new computer I figured I would do my homework and see how far the consoles have come. I researched both the PS3 and the other system and decided to go with the PS3 because of its newer technology. I got my $600 80GB PS3 and hooked it up and let me tell you how impressed I was. The PS3 reminded me more of a computer than a console, and with its wireless capabilities, hard drive, USB ports, and HDMI, I was hooked. I have my PS3 networked to my PC so I can stream all my pictures, music, and video to my PS3 and play all my movies and games in 1080p HD—not to mention how amazing the audio is. The one thing missing is MMORPGs on the PS3. If the PS3 had games like that I would never touch my PC again. So is there any word on games like *Warhammer Online* coming to the PS3? Or *Lord of the Rings Online?*

Edward Sawacki, The Internet

Rob: Welcome to PS3 gaming. While there's no word on those particular MMOs coming to PS3, you will have options. Sony Online is developing *The Agency* as an action-focused spy caper that's a full massively multiplayer online game, and also has *DC Universe Online* bubbling away for PS3 play some time in the future. MMO publisher NCsoft also announced an exclusive deal with SCEA to create games for PS3, but no word on specifics yet. So while it might require a bit of a wait, come 2009 your MMO cup should runneth over on PS3.

XBOX EX-CLUSIVES?

Do you think *Mass Effect* or *Crackdown* will come to the PS3 in the near future?

Bruce Springer, Sidney, KY

Rob: No. Well, it's possible, given the Electronic Arts acquisition of BioWare/Pandemic that a spin-off of the *Mass Effect* franchise could appear, but it's highly unlikely. If you're looking for a game like *Crackdown*, keep your eye on Sucker Punch's just-announced-but-we-don't-know-jack-about-it open-world game, *inFamous*.

OOOH, PLASTIC... SHINY

I only have one real burning question to ask... Why doesn't Sony have any type of points cards yet? I don't feel comfortable handing out my credit card information online regardless of how "secure" it might be. All that info is stored on our hard drives and if your system were to get stolen… well, you get the idea. I want games, I buy a card, punch in my code, and voila, I can buy whatever I want. Does Sony realize how much more money and sales they could be making? I've bought 50 games on my Xbox 360 and more than 20 on my Wii. Is there any hope?

Dan Meloche, The Internet

Rob: There's hope. They're coming. We're just not sure when (though we have seen one for realsies). Under the Transaction Management tab when you log in to PlayStation Network exists an option to redeem a card. So the technology exists, but we suspect security concerns are holding up the big reveal.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
Previews
Soul Calibur IV

CALL IT "CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM"

Thanks for giving me this forum to rant and rave. First the rave: the new look is awesome, it's very slick and the new layout takes nothing away from the writing. But a rant: how about continuing to publish whether the games are multiplayer and other supports? By the way, have you guys noticed during CBS football coverage that their graphics resemble PSPs?

Amber Winkowski, Alameda, CA

Teresa: Woah, Amber, it's hard to tell whether you love us or hate us. (Since we can't tell, we'll assume you love us!) To address your concern: we do mention if a game supports multiplayer, but it's usually embedded in the text of the review. It's always in there, though! And I don't watch football regularly, so I haven't noticed any PSP resemblance… I'll keep an eye out now that you've mentioned it, though.

YOUR TAKE / FAN ART

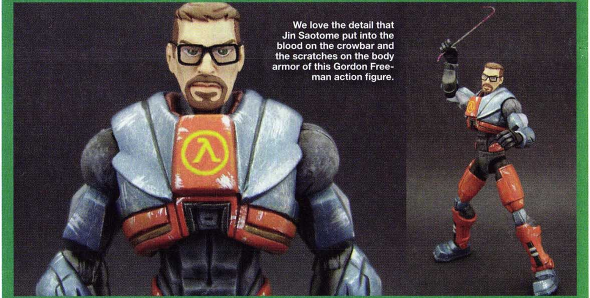
WE'RE ART WHORES. NO, REALLY, WE ARE.

Dear Editors,

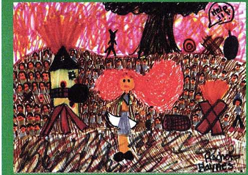
Do you think you could have a fan art page so we could show how much we like the magazine? Can't wait till the next issue.

Joe Price, The Internet

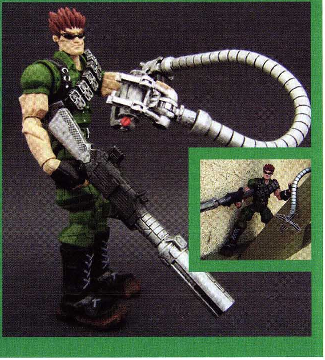
Teresa: Your wish is our command, Joe. Check out the art (below) people have sent in! On that note, we should mention: we love art. Send us art! Cartoons, paintings, cosplay photos, etch-a-sketched pics, collages, sculptures made out of toilet paper rolls, tattoos, whatever, we love it all. The only caveat is that they must be PlayStation related! (Well, duh, we're a PlayStation magazine.) We won't always be able to display your work, but we love admiring it! Someday, there might even be a prize for the art we print, but for now, you'll just have to settle for the glory of being a *published* starving artist. **Send Fan Art submissions to letters@psmonline.com.**



We love the detail that Jin Saotome put into the blood on the crowbar and the scratches on the body armor of this Gordon Freeman action figure.



Nine-year-old Rachel Haynes drew this picture of Nariko from *Heavenly Sword* (a game, her mom says, that she's not allowed to play yet). Keep it up, Rachel! We expect to see masterpieces from you in ten years!



With Capcon's recent announcement of *Bionic Commando,* Jin decided to put together an old school version of the commando in honor of the new game. We love the coy expression!

contact Send us your thoughts and comments to letters@psmonline.com. We're eager to hear what you think about the new magazine, clean look, and refreshed scoring system.

PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for the price of a few guitar picks. We say Yea or Nay.

+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

- **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.

Rock Band Keeps Bringing The Rock

PRICE: $.99-1.99 **CO-PUBLISHER:** MTV Games

+ It's the game that keeps on giving (for a price). As a model of post-release support—and testimony to the core product itself being a gaming platform—the *Rock Band* phenomenon maintains its momentum on the PlayStation Store. Though the $170 initial game price ($160 for the PlayStation 2 version) is a significant investment in itself, some 50-plus additional songs are now available for download. Three song sets are priced at $5.49, and single songs for $1.99. A handful of songs from less prominent bands (actor Jared Leto's band 30 Seconds to Mars, and The All-American Rejects) were initially released at 99 cents, but then inexplicably raised to the regular $1.99 price on February 1st. Word from MTV is that future songs could release anywhere from 99 cents to $2.99. Expect the higher price for some signature songs as record companies and bands themselves identify *Rock Band* as a method of getting new music out. A song from Metallica's new album is scheduled to be released first for download into *Rock Band.*

Your mileage from these new options will vary entirely based on yours and your band mates' musical taste. The collection is balanced to fit a wide range of song tiers for each instrument, and all the ones we tried deliver the signature Harmonix playability.

Here are our picks, based entirely on, well, what we like and who our inner rock star wants to be!

Oasis

Because one of us is English, so it's the law!

- Don't Look Back In Anger
- Live Forever
- Wonderwall

T-Rex

Because we're old!

- Bang a Gong (Get it On)

Faith No More

Because our nasally singing voice can hit the notes!

- We Care A Lot

Punk pack

Because if we had hair it would be green, spiked, and in a Mohawk.

- Ever Fallen In Love – The Buzzcocks
- I Fought The Law – The Clash
- Rockaway Beach – The Ramones

Weezer

Because we wanted to be in *Happy Days,* too! Now, where's that cardigan sweater?

- Buddy Holly

And now we're curious – what's your *Rock Band* name? Send us your band name, name of the members, and their main role or instrument, and we'll print a few of the best.

Rock Coming Soon

Expanding the music library still further, developer Harmonix and publisher MTV have announced that full albums will be released some time (still to be determined) in the future. The two albums revealed so far are The Who classic Who's Next, and the phenomenal Nevermind, Nirvana's seminal album of the grunge age. The price for these full albums is also still to be revealed, and considering the $5.49 price for a three song set, you may need to pay $18 to $20 to rock along to albums you may already own.

More single song and three-song sets are already in the on-deck circle. A Thrash pack will be released on March 4th and fans of Nine Inch Nails get a three song pack on March 18th. Fueling the Metal fire is a set featuring songs tracks from Metallica, Black Sabbath, and Iron Maiden that should hit the PlayStation Store on March 25th.

PLAYSTATION STORE

Our favorite downloads from the PlayStation Store this month:

▶QUASARILLI

The PlayStation Underground ran a contest a while back inviting members to create Folks for *Folklore.* The winning entry would be made into an actual creature that players could download and interact with in the game. Well, a winner has been chosen: congratulations to Lisa K. for her winning entry, Quasarilli. This little critter has the ability to teleport and create tornados. Download it for free at the PlayStation Store!

▲CRASH BANDICOOT: WARPED

This classic PlayStation title is now available for download for either your PS3 or PSP. The game is a bit short, but it's pure platforming goodness, and for only $5.99, we consider it a steal. In case you need more motivation than that, we'll remind you that it's by Naughty Dog, the developers of *Uncharted* and the *Jak* series.

▲PIXELJUNK MONSTERS

Gracing our PS3's interface this month is the artistically simplistic *PixelJunk Monsters* theme (the one with the trees, cannon, and stone monster). We like the etched wood icons and the clear blue skies. It reminds us of the innocence of childhood. Ironic, considering it's such a brutal game!

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and this really is my social security number.* I'm here just to prove how safe your identity can be with LifeLock. All of us, no matter how careful, can become victims of identity theft. In fact, every three seconds another identity is stolen.

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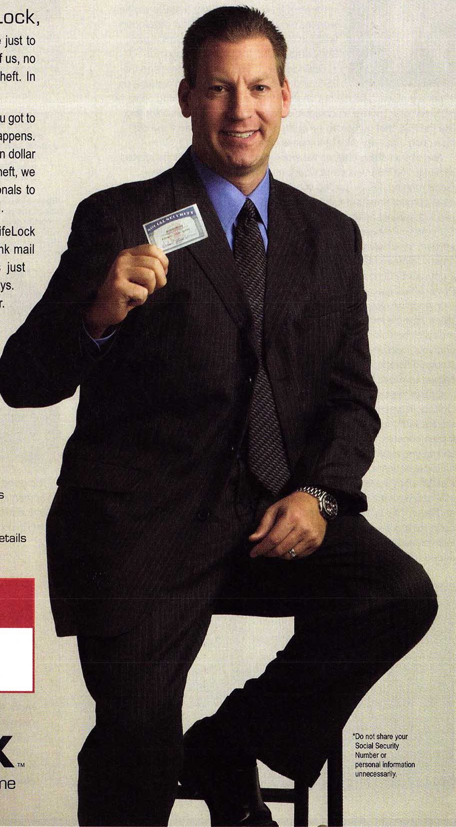

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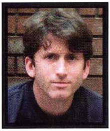
PlayStation POV

Bethesda's Executive Producer, Todd Howard, waxes lyrical about developing for PS3



Congratulations proud PS3 owner, you have a very good year ahead of you. You can feel the PS3 turning the corner now, and not just in terms of its price or the fact that Blu-ray has won the HD war; the keys are that developers finally learned how to use the machine and Sony stepped up their tools support.

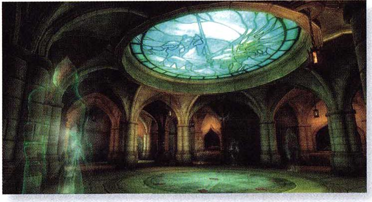
Oblivion was one of the first games on the PS3, and while we benefited from working on a game that was already out on the 360, we were still working on early PS3 dev kits. There's an obvious learning curve, and with something like the PS3 that curve can be pretty steep. We had to do it the old fashioned way—try a lot of things and see what worked.

And like anything else, as we worked on the system, things started clicking. The PS3 version of *Oblivion* ultimately proved to be the faster running, faster loading version. Much of this is due to the extra development time, but it proved to us that the PS3 could do what we needed; we just needed to do it in different ways under the hood. The Synergistic Processing Units (SPUs) can be tasked with small, memory efficient tasks like processing files as they load off the disk, which can greatly improve load times. You compress something on the disk, load it onto an SPU and let the SPU decompress it for you while the main Physics Processing Unit (PPU) does other things.

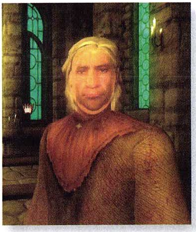
In addition, you can use the Blu-ray's massive storage capacity to place multiple instances of your game's assets on the disk. Having multiple copies on the disc greatly reduces seek times off the drive, and your load times shrink even more. Small things like this can make a huge difference over the course of a game. That kind of learning has helped us move from *Oblivion* to *Fallout 3.*

One of the benefits we have with *Fallout 3* on the PS3 is not just the *Oblivion* learning experience, but over the last year Sony has made big strides with their tools. There's two ways to learn how to eek out power from a console: either try lots of things over and over, or use a tool that shows you exactly what's going on and what you need to do. You may have never heard of GCM Replay, but this tool allows developers to see exactly what the Graphics Processing Unit on the PS3 is doing.

When we were doing *Oblivion,* this tool didn't exist; it was trial and error. This is the type of tool that allows us to iterate, debug, and optimize much faster than before. In addition, Sony's Tuner program lets you see what is going on in the PPU, and over the last year they've added functionality to better control the SPUs.

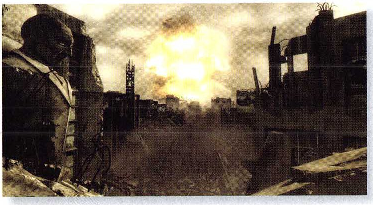


Oblivion is available in a Game of the Year Edition on PS3, and includes the expansion packs *Knights of the Nine* and *Shivering Isles.*



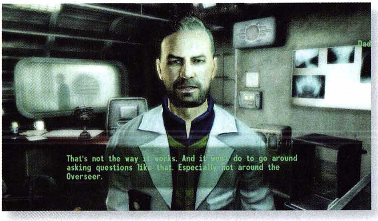
Todd Howard (right) was designer and project lead on *The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind,* and held the same position on past *Terminator* franchise Bethesda games. He's now Executive Producer of the *The Elder Scrolls* and *Fallout 3.*

We're already super-psyched about the potential of *Fallout 3*'s ambitious game design blended with the wit and style that defined the franchise's personality in the original PC releases.



The good news is that it shows in the game. We're able to put a lot more on screen in *Fallout* then we ever dreamed of in *Oblivion.* So if the future of PS3 doesn't excite you, go buy some Blu-ray movies and yell "suckers!" at your HD-DVD friends; that works too.

Todd Howard, Executive Producer, Bethesda



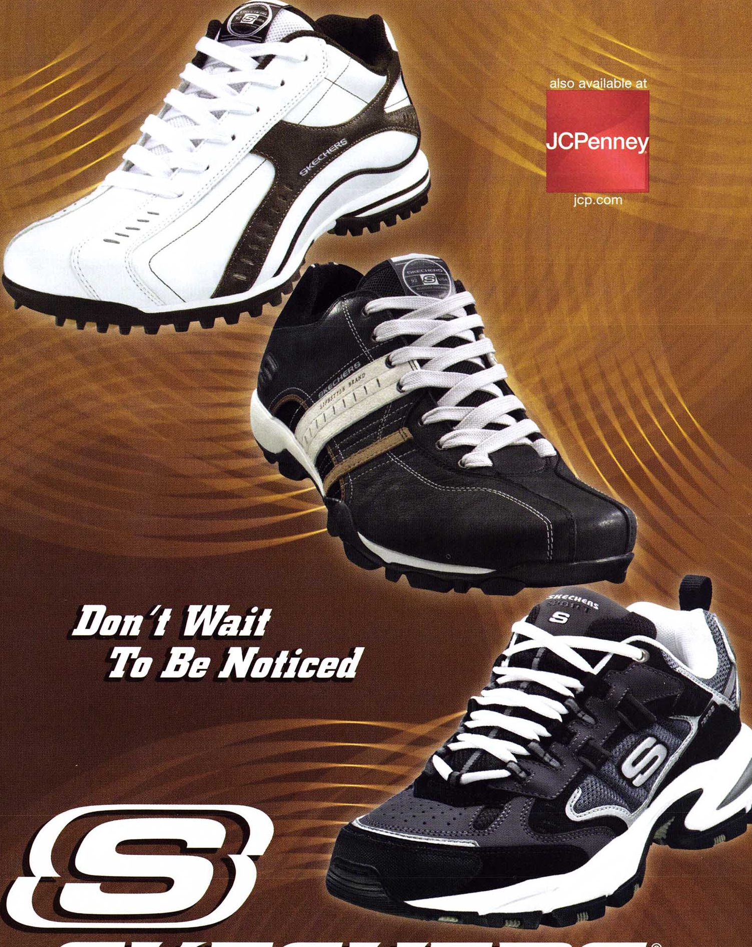
That's not the way it works. And it won't do to go around asking questions like that. Especially not around the Overseer.

Next month

In PlayStation: The Official Magazine

A talented development studio called Illusion Softworks has thrived under the radar in its base in Prague, Czech Republic. It was recently acquired by 2K Games and renamed as 2K Czech. On our radar since that move was ***Mafia 2.*** Building on the acclaimed original gangster game, the PlayStation 3 version will blow you away.

Plus, we'll give you the inside skinny on more open-world gaming with ***Saints Row 2.*** On the review front, the cup runneth over as we give you the buying advice you need on ***MLB 08: The Show, Turning Point,*** and, oh yes, ***Gran Turismo 5 Prologue.***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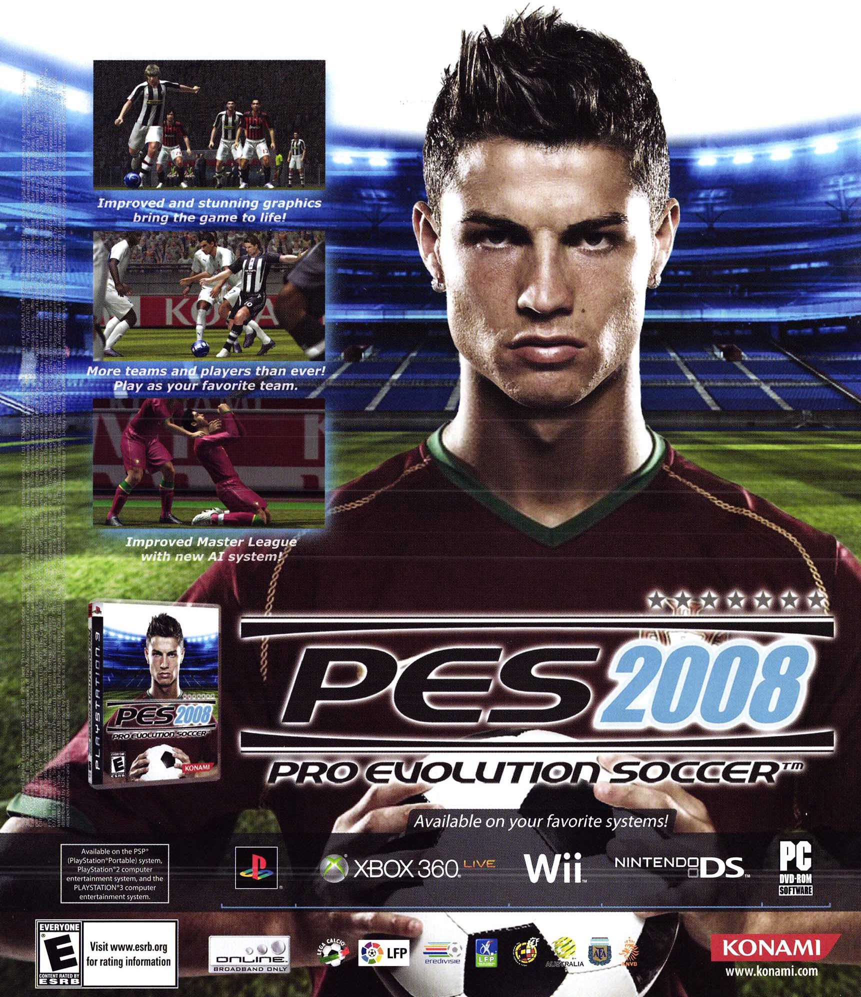

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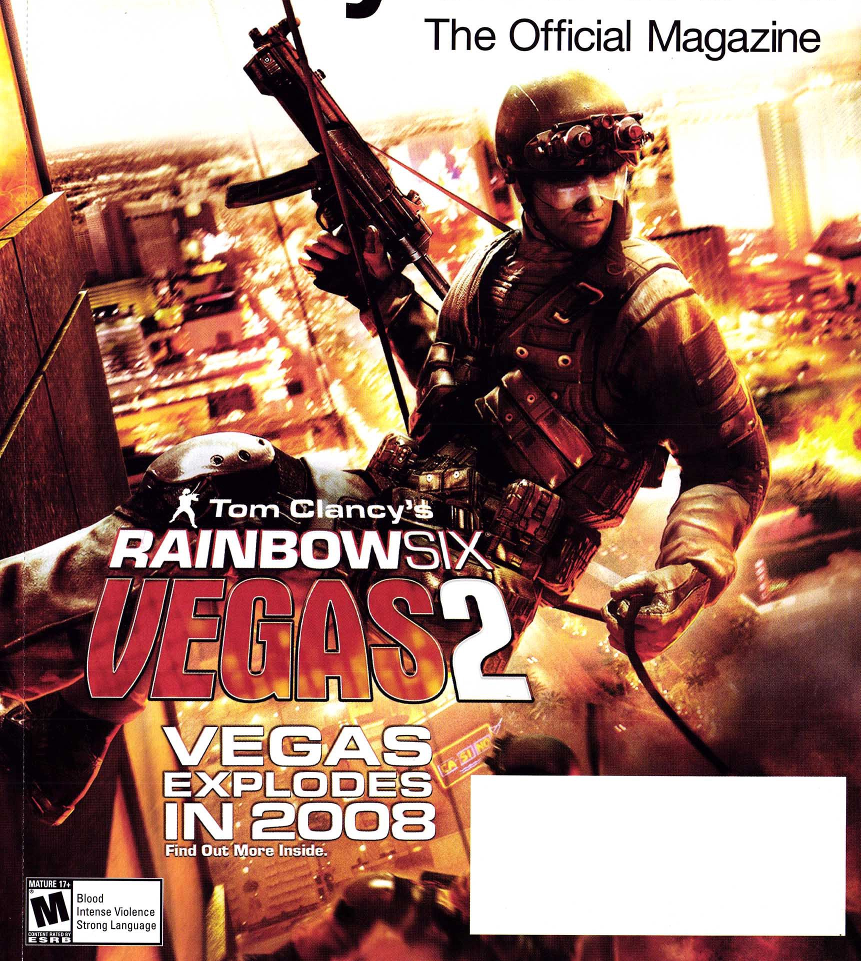
The Official Magazine



Tom Clancy's

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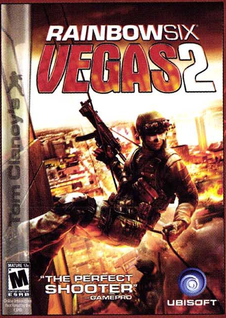
Find Out More Inside.

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language

THE STAKES HAVE BEEN RAISED

The Sequel to the 2006 Online Game of the Year Infiltrates Next Gen and PC


Tom Clancy's
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> – OXM

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MULTIPLAYER - TEAM LEADER

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MULTIPLAYER - TEAM LEADER

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OUTFITTING

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Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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UBISOFT

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VEGAS 2
MATURE 17+
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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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Tom Clancy's

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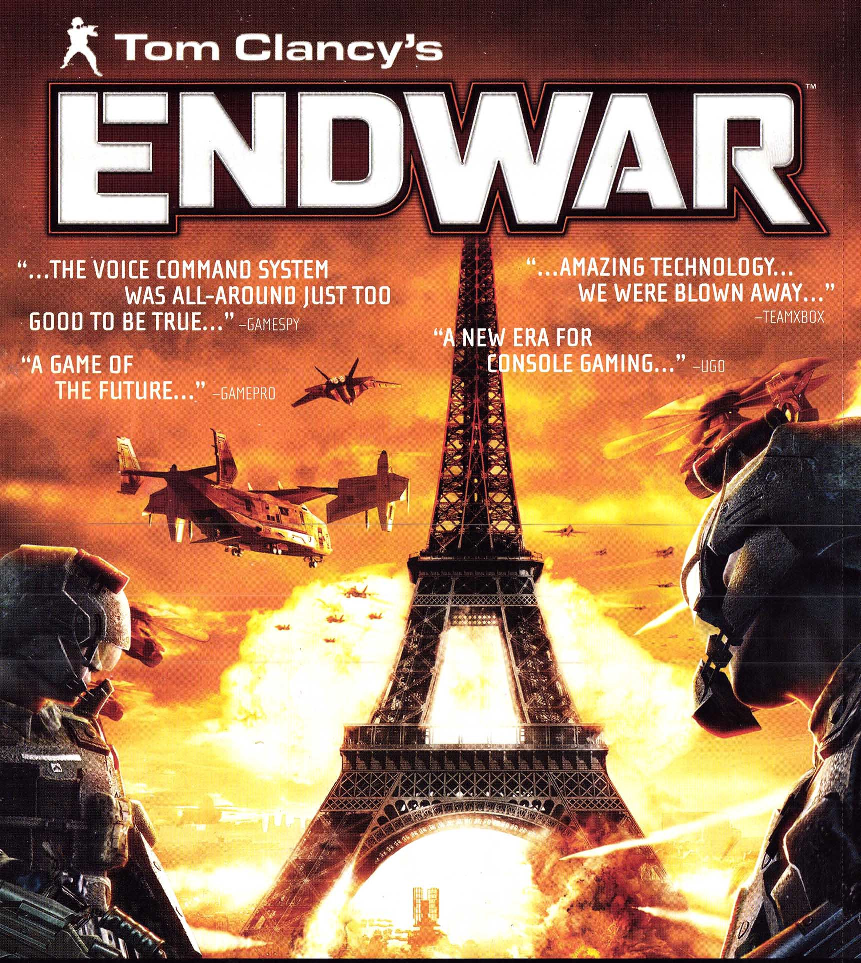
"...THE VOICE COMMAND SYSTEM WAS ALL-AROUND JUST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE..." –GAMESPY
"...AMAZING TECHNOLOGY... WE WERE BLOWN AWAY..." –TEAMXBOX
"A NEW ERA FOR CONSOLE GAMING..." –UGO
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COMING FALL 2008 TO THE TOM CLANCY ARSENAL

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